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ALBERTA'S BLACK SETTLERS: A STUDY OF CANADIAN IMMIGRATION POLICY AND PRACTICE

BY

© JUDITH S. HILL

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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Abstract

During the years 1910-1912, approximately 1300 black farmers from Oklahoma immigrated to Alberta and Saskatchewan. Unlike most immigrants, they were motivated more by the desire to escape racism and discrimination than by the attraction of free land and the opportunity to make a fresh start. During the early years of this century, the southern United States was characterized by racial hatred. Politically, this racism was manifested through disfranchisement and segregation and socially, through increasing lawlessness and violence. Indirectly, this turmoil was a source of strength to many blacks. It produced in them a sense of identity, a stubborn self-sufficiency and an imperviousness to insult. These were all qualities which would serve them well in Alberta.

As a safety valve when outbursts ofracial repression became unbearable, American blacks developed a tradition of migration. Small numbers of discontented blacks emigrated to the African nations of Liberia and Sierra Leone while thousands more joined well-organized migration movements to the newly opened south-western states of Kansas and Oklahoma. The immigration of Oklahoma blacks to Alberta and Saskatchewan shared many of the characteristics of these earlier migrations.

As the number of blacks entering the Canadian west increased, public opinion in Alberta became inflamed. The

Oklahoma blacks were perceived as a grave threat; in part because they were believed to be the vanguard of another one hundred thousand, but also because of fears that their presence would undermine Anglo-Saxon civilization. Alberta society during the settlement period was ethnocentric and nativistic. The prevalence of these attitudes made it inevitable that blacks would be viewed as unacceptable immigrants and that efforts would be made to exclude them.

Albertans pressured the federal government to strengthen its unofficial opposition to black immigration by introducing restrictive legislation. Although discriminatory measures had already been imposed against Asian immigrants, Ottawa was reluctant to take overt action against American blacks because of possible domestic and international repercussions. Finally, a compromise solution was found. No discriminatory legislation was enacted but existing immigration regulations were rigorously and selectively enforced so as to exclude the vast majority of prospective black immigrants.

This unhappy immigration experience and memories of American oppression were the forces which shaped the settlements established by the black immigrants. The black immigrants sought isolation from the dominant society and the opportunity to establish their own closely knit, self sufficient communities. The focus of this thesis is Amber Valley, the largest settlement established by Oklahoma blacks in Alberta and the one which best exemplifies the black immigration experience.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

During the years 1910-1912, approximately 1300 black farmers from Oklahoma immigrated to Alberta and Saskatchewan. This thesis is a study of that immigration and of an Alberta community that resulted from it. Although not important in terms of numbers, black immigration was significant because of what it revealed about Alberta society and the nature of ethnic settlement.

No immigrants to Alberta have ever received a more hostile reception than the Oklahoma blacks. They were perceived as a threat; in part because they were believed to be the vanguard of another one hundred thousand but also because of fears that their presence would undermine Anglo-Saxon civilization. By its very nature, Alberta society in the early part of this century was racist. This obsession with racial matters made it inevitable that blacks would be viewed as unacceptable immigrants and that efforts would be made to exclude them.

Racial hostility was certainly not a new experience for the Oklahoma blacks. The southern United States was characterized at that time by racial hatred. This racism was manifested politically through segregation and disfranchisement, and socially through increasing lawlessness and violence. Indirectly, this turmoil was a source of strength to many blacks. It produced in them a sense of identity, a stubborn self-sufficiency and an imperviousness to insult. These were all qualities which would serve them well in Alberta.

As the number of blacks entering Alberta rose and rumors spread of thousands more converging on the border, public opinion in Alberta became inflamed. The federal government found itself under intense pressure to strengthen its unofficial opposition to black immigration by passing restrictive legislation. Ottawa was reluctant to take this action for fear of offending both the United States and black voters in eastern Canada. Finally, a compromise solution was found. No discriminatory legislation was enacted but prospective black immigrants were subjected to an unusually zealous scrutiny by Immigration Branch officials at the border and all regulations relating to health and finances were rigidly enforced. Black immigration soon dwindled to a trickle.

This unhappy immigration experience and memories of American oppression were the forces which shaped the settlements established by black immigrants. The focus of this thesis is Amber Valley, a black community in northern Alberta. It was the largest of the black settlements and also the one which best exemplifies the black immigrant experience. For Amber Valley was an unusual phenomenon on the Alberta scene; a compact settlement of blacks, isolated, closely knit and large enough to be self-sufficient.

The establishment of black agricultural settlements in Alberta and Saskatchewan also represents a unique episode in the history of blacks in Canada. The majority of Canada's blacks had arrived in Ontario and the Maritimes fifty or a hundred years earlier and under completely different circumstances. Most were slaves or refugees from slavery with few resources and skills with which to begin life in a new land. Some were established by white philanthropists on poorly managed colonies while the rest received little assistance beyond the allotment of small plots of inferior land. A large proportion failed as farmers, becoming wards of the state, beggars or peddlers and facing considerable discrimination from the white population.[1] The establishment of settlements such as Amber Valley vindicated these earlier failures, proving that under more favorable conditions, blacks could become successful, independent farmers.

But all this was still far in the future on that spring day in 1910 when the first contingent of black settlers from Oklahoma stepped off the train at Edmonton. In many ways the society they were about to enter was similar to the one they had left. Like Oklahoma, the five year old province of Alberta was rugged and dynamic, a society in the midst of rapid change. The vast emptiness of Alberta's prairie and parkland was filling with settlers from all parts of Canada, the United States and Europe. To these newcomers, enticed to the 'Last Best West' by the heady promises of immigration propaganda, Alberta offered a chance to make a fresh start, to attain a higher material standard and better opportunities for their children. Most new Albertans settled on homestead lands, taking advantage of the Dominion Lands Act's promise of 160 acres, providing they could clear it, crop it and live on it for three years.

The process of settlement proceeded at an astonishing rate. By 1911, Alberta had a population of 374,663. In 1901, there had been only 73,022, most of them concentrated near the province's two railway lines, the CPR transcontinental line in the south of the province and the Calgary and Edmonton Railway.[2] As the pace of immigration quickened, homeseekers soon outstripped the railway, pushing up rapidly through the parkland past Edmonton. As early as 1905, areas as far north as Westlock and Smoky Lake were heavily settled. By the end of 1911, there would be little unoccupied arable land south of the Athabasca River and as far east as Lac la Biche.[3] The only sizable area of rich soil untouched by the plough was located far to the north, in the Peace River country. But even here the first intrepid settlers had ventured as early as 1908, greatly outdistancing the railways which would not arrive until 1916. Those hardy souls who ventured to Peace River faced a grueling 500 mile winter journey by foot from Edmonton along narrow trails hacked through the bush.[4] Small wonder that many of them became disheartened and were easily persuaded by the boosters and real estate agents of the tiny community of Athabasca to settle there instead.

In general though, railroad construction kept pace with settlement. Their relationship was symbiotic; settlers needed railways to transport their agricultural produce to market and railroads needed settlers to generate traffic for their lines. During the years between 1905 and 1910, railroad construction in Alberta proceeded at a furious pace. Canada's second transcontinental line, the Canadian Northern Railway, reached Edmonton in 1905, facilitating the settlement of central Alberta. A third nation-spanning line, the Grand Trunk Pacific, reached the city in 1909.[5] During this period, politics in Alberta were dominated by railroads and the scandals associated with them. Every tiny hamlet envisioned itself as a major railway centre and the first Alberta Legislature was pressured to charter a number of local lines. One of the most important of these, a branch of the Canadian Northern, reached Morinville in 1906 and proceeded by way of Clyde and the Tawatinaw River valley, arriving in Athabasca in 1912.[6]

Most of the new railroads would soon be hauling farm products. For Alberta, with 61,496 farms in 1910, was overwhelmingly agricultural.[7] Because settlement had proceeded across the prairies from east to west, Alberta was at a somewhat earlier stage of agricultural development than its neighbors. Alberta's population was 24% less than that of Saskatchewan in 1911 and its acreage of improved land was 63% lower.[8] The nature of agriculture in the two provinces also differed. Alberta's earliest settlers had concentrated on raising livestock rather than grain. As the new century began, field crops became increasingly important. But in 1910 the total value of Alberta's animal production still exceeded that of field crops by 40% contrasting with Saskatchewan where field crops brought in three times more revenue than animal products.[9]

A number of factors during the first decade of the century encouraged a change in emphasis from livestock to grain crops, particularly wheat. Internationally, grain prices were favorable and steadily rising, due largely to the rapid pace of industrialization and urbanization in Europe, the United States and eastern Canada. Between 1896 and 1914 the price of exported Canadian grain rose by 66%.[10]

At the same time, improved agricultural technology and the development of dryland farming techniques were making agriculture feasible in the semi-arid grasslands of southern Alberta. Ranching declined as homesteaders, encouraged by several years of unusually heavy rainfall, moved into areas which they had previously shunned.[11]

In the central and more northerly areas of the province, improvements in grain varieties made possible a shift in emphasis from oats to wheat. Marquis wheat, with its higher yield and shorter maturing period, was tested in western Canada in 1908 and was widely used by 1911.[12] By that time, wheat had become Alberta's dominant field crop. Whereas in 1906 only 27.6% of the total grain crop acreage was in wheat, by 1911 the figure had climbed to 54%.[13] Yet in most areas of the province, farmers would continue to combine grain production with livestock raising. The average Alberta farmer owned twelve cows and oxen, four pigs and seven or eight horses.[14] Although 61% of the farms were under 200 acres in area, the provincial average was 288.6 acres, with 70.7 acres of improved land per farm.[15] The majority of the larger farms were doubtless located in the arid regions of the province where most homesteaders soon found their original 160 acres insufficient.

Rapid urban development accompanied the settlement process because of the need of Alberta farmers for agricultural support industries and professional and financial services. At various points along the railway line a number of services would congregate; perhaps a grain elevator or two, a general store and a post office. In time these modest enterprises would provide the basis for a new town. By 1911, 38% of the province's population were urban dwellers.[16] Alberta boasted five cities, twenty-four towns and thirty-three villages. The largest urban centre was Calgary with 43,704 residents; Edmonton with its population of 24,900 was a distant second.[17]

Yet despite its smaller size, Edmonton had several advantages over its southern rival. It was the provincial capital, home of Arthur Sifton's Liberal government, and its sister city of Strathcona was the location of the fledgling University of Alberta. Edmonton itself was growing at an unprecedented rate as settlers poured into the northern half of the province. The city enjoyed a real estate boom during the years 1910 and 1911. New residential subdivisions were launched almost daily in an effort to accommodate the several thousand tent-dwellers on the outskirts of the city. The price of land rose at a rate out of all proportion to its real value. Downtown property on Jasper Avenue was priced at $10,000 per front foot.[18] With good reason, Edmonton's real estate agents and businessmen foresaw a rosy future for the young city.

At least part of Edmonton's prosperity was derived from industry. A large proportion of Alberta's 290 manufacturing concerns were located in the city, each employing an average of three people. For the most part these were processors of raw materials; saw mills, brick-works, flour mills and butter and cheese producers.[19]

Resource extraction was another important source of wealth. Twenty-three coal mines operated in the Edmonton area, and another thirty-six mines were located elsewhere in the province, notably at Banff, Lethbridge, and in the Crowsnest Pass.[20] A bright future was predicted for the province's newly-launched oil and natural gas industry. In 1904, the Premier had himself participated in the North-West Gas and Oil Co. which drilled a number of wells inside the boundaries of Edmonton.[21] And in 1906 the Athabasca Oil Company had commenced drilling operations near Fort McMurray.[22]

Newcomers to the province were dazzled and bewildered by the complex melange of peoples from virtually every nation imaginable. By choice and sometimes out of necessity the province's smaller ethnic groups tended to segregate themselves, congregating in separate areas of the province. As a result, the region around Edmonton contained numerous large pockets of ethnic settlement; Ukrainians to the east, Austrians and French north of the city, Germans and Scandinavians to the south.[23] Dispersed fairly evenly throughout the province and forming the majority of the population in the urban areas, were the three major nationalities; Canadians, Americans and British. This dominant community believed assimilation to the Anglo-Saxon norm to be essential and were often dismayed at the fierce determination of some of the more exotic ethnic groups to retain their own cultures and languages. With fear and helpless frustration, they watched the rising proportion of southern and eastern Europeans among the province's newcomers. Albertans and their provincial government had little control over how their province was settled. The Federal Government had sole jurisdiction in immigration matters and when the province was formed, had retained the power to administer its natural resources and public lands in the interests of efficient settlement. The motives and policies of the central government were often profoundly mistrusted by Albertans. By 1910, when the first large contingent of Oklahoma blacks arrived, Albertans were very testy on issues involving ethnic immigration.

Footnotes

[1] A good discussion of early black settlers in Canada can be found in Robin W. Winks, The Blacks in Canada,(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

[2] Canada Yearbook, 1912, p.3.

[3] J.G. MacGregor, A History of Alberta,(Edmonton: Hurtig, 1972), p. 196.

[4] Ibid., p. 206.

[5] L.G. Thomas, "The Liberal Party in Alberta," (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1953), p. 64.

[6] MacGregor, History of Alberta, p. 202.

[7] Census of Canada, 1911, Vol. IV, p. 2.

[8] Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 2 & 119; Vol. IV, p. XIV.

[9] Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. xcii - xciii.

[10] Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed,(Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p. 50.

[11] W.A MacKintosh and W.L.G. Jones, gen. eds., Canadian Frontiers of Settlement, (Toronto: MacMillan, 1938), Vol. 2: History of Prairie Settlement, by A.S. Morton, p. 137.

[12] Ibid., p. 149.

[13] Canada Yearbook, 1912, p. 60.

[14] Census of Canada, 1911, Vol. IV, p. 411.

[15] Ibid., p. XVI.

[16] Canada Yearbook, 1912, p. 14.

[17] Ibid., p. 9.

[18] J.G. MacGregor, Edmonton: A History, (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1972), p. 179.

[19] Census of Canada, 1911, Vol. III, p. 210.

[20] MacGregor, Edmonton: A History, p. 158.

[21] Thomas, "The Liberal Party in Alberta," p. 117.

[22] Ibid., p. 118.

[23] Carl Betke, "The United Farmers of Alberta, 1921-35.", (M.A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1971), p. 6.

CHAPTER 2: Canadian Immigration Policy: Closing the Open Door

I - The Canadian View of Race

Albertans were not alone in the emphasis they placed on racial matters. The 19th and early 20th centuries were the heyday of racism, a time when the origins and attributes of the various races of mankind were earnestly discussed by the elite circles of western Europe, Britain and the United States. Central to this racism was the notion of white supremacy. The 19th century mind, accustomed to hierarchies, was unable to visualize a society in which two or more races could exist in a state of harmonious equality. Where two races co-existed, one must of necessity accept a subordinate status or be eliminated.[1] This belief contradicted both traditional Christian teachings and 18th century notions of egalitarianism. So new doctrines were invented, cloaked in the garb of science and anthropology, to make the new racism credible and acceptable.

Social Darwinism, an offshoot of Darwin's biological theory of the gradual evolution of plants and animals, was one of these new racial theories. Extremely popular during the 1870s and 1880s, Social Darwinism held that the progress of civilization results from a process of natural selection and unrestricted competition. The strongest and best societies tend to prevail over the others. Not surprisingly, Social Darwinians believed that European civilization was superior to all others.[2]

No European nation adopted the new racism with more enthusiasm than Britain. By the mid 19th century, the British had developed a sense of racial uniqueness, a firm belief that the Anglo-Saxon race possessed superior physical and intellectual qualities. The British viewed themselves as a stalwart, morally upright people, with a special capacity for constitutional self-government and a talent for administering justice.[3] Not far behind came the notion that the benefits of the British way of life should be shared with the less enlightened peoples of the world. This racism became a justification for imperialism as the British accepted the 'white man's burden' of conquering and ruling the supposedly inferior races.

As a bastion of the empire, Canada shared fully in this belief in the superiority and unique destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race. It was natural that it should, as the people who set the social and intellectual tone in Canada, outside of Quebec, were primarily of British stock. By the end of the 19th century, a sense of Canadian identity was emerging, one element of which was the development of a belief in a mythical northern race. This racial theory characterized northern races as strong, self-reliant, energetic and individualistic, superior in all ways to the supposedly weak, indolent and emotional southern races.[4] Many Canadian nationalists believed that a new northern race was being created in Canada, tempered by a harsh and demanding climate.

This developing sense of racial identity and pride was an important consideration for Canadians whenever the subject of immigration was discussed. In the years after 1896, the open immigration policies of the Laurier Government resulted in a stampede of newcomers from Britain, Europe and the United States. Many Canadians, particularly in the west, began to feel uneasy about the quality of this immigration. An emerging sense of national identity made them more certain of the nature of the new society they wished to create and fearful that the Government's indiscriminate immigration policy would have long-term damaging effects. Stephen Leacock, the humorist and conservative economist expressed this view,

> The prairies of the west blossomed and withered under the suns of unnumbered ages before the coming of the harvester; the forests of British Columbia have slept in silence for countless winters before the proprietor measured them into their billions of feet of timber. Let them stand a little longer till we can rest assured that the men who fell them will belong to a nation worthy of the task.[5]

The basic criterion for being judged 'worthy' was whiteness since Canadians were nearly unanimous in their wish for a homogenous white society.[6] But not all white immigrants were welcomed with equal fervor. Canadians were most anxious ~~to~~ receive those whose language, values and traditions were most similar to their own. Immigrants from the mother country were naturally regarded as the most desirable, except if they were semi-literate charity recipients from London's east end. Almost as highly regarded as the British were settlers from the United States, welcomed perhaps as much for the machinery, capital and farm skills they brought with them as for their cultural attributes.[7] Third on the list of desirable immigrants were members of the non-British 'northern races', the Germans, Dutch, Scandinavians and French. These nationalities, it was thought, possessed the same sterling qualities as the British, and after surmounting the language barrier would make excellent citizens.

Of the white immigrants it was those from Eastern Europe who caused Canadians the most concern. To the average British Canadian, these people were unmistakably foreign. They were poverty-stricken, often illiterate, and their language, culture and dress were exotic. In the west, fears were expressed that this seemingly ignorant peasantry would debase the cultural level of the entire area, and being familiar only with autocratic rule, would undermine British traditions of self-government.[8] Civilization was clearly in danger, claimed the alarmists.

Most Anglo-Canadians were much more optimistic however, believing that the problems of European immigration could be solved by assimilation. They demanded that immigrants renounce their traditional culture in favor of 'Anglo-Saxon' customs and values, a goal which would be accomplished through missionary work, language training, and above all by the schools which became virtual training grounds for citizenship.[9]

Clearly, Canadians early in this century, had little patience with notions of multiculturalism. They feared heterogeneity, believing it would destroy their capacity to perpetuate the values and traditions they had inherited from Britain. As well, they feared it would make the creation of a strong, unified Canadian nation impossible.[10]

Hoping that the East European immigration problem would be solved by assimilation, Canadians were left facing an even more perplexing immigration issue: a steady influx of non-white immigrants. Without hesitation, most Canadians supported the demagogic rallying cry that Canada must remain a "white man's country". Most of the turmoil centred in British Columbia, the unwilling recipient of a substantial immigration of Chinese, Japanese and East Indians during the three decades preceding 1910. The Chinese were the first to enter the province, brought in by the thousands to work on the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Its completion in 1885 threw them out of work and into direct competition with whites for jobs. Accustomed to a poor standard of living, their willingness to accept wages from 30% to 50% less than white labourers, led to intense hostility.[11] The problem was exacerbated by the arrival after 1899 of the Japanese and of East Indians in 1906 and 1907. After a time, the conviction that the Japanese were gaining control of certain industries, notably fishing and market gardening, made many whites feel doubly threatened.

British Columbia's Asian population increased rapidly. In 1891 there were 8,910 Chinese, out of a total population of 98,173. By 1901 the Chinese community had grown to 14,869.[12] Public feeling against the Chinese rose in proportion and the west coast province attempted to deal with its unwanted alien presence. In 1884 and 1885, the federal government disallowed three Acts passed by the British Columbia legislature, "An Act to Prevent Chinese from Acquiring Crown Land", "An Act to Prevent the Immigration of Chinese" and "An Act to Regulate the Chinese Population of British Columbia".[13] Undaunted, British Columbians changed their tactics in later years and concentrated on pressuring the federal government to restrict Chinese immigration. Meanwhile, anti-Oriental activity within the general population of British Columbia progressed beyond the customary taunts, discrimination, vandalism and assaults. In 1907, Vancouver was rocked by a serious race riot as enraged mobs inflicted extensive damage on the Chinese and Japanese sections of the city.[14]

In Alberta, news of the Vancouver riot was applauded by a large segment of the population. Alberta's own Chinese community had increased from 31 in 1891 to 235 in 1901 and would reach 1,787 by 1911.[15] Most of the Chinese were migrants from British Columbia who had congregated in Calgary, Edmonton, Macleod and Lethbridge where they operated restaurants and laundries serving the male-dominated frontier society. Hostility to the Chinese was widespread, prevented only by the small size of the Chinese population and Alberta's greater concern over East European immigration, from becoming as virulent as in British Columbia.[16] Nevertheless, anti-Chinese actions were common, particularly in the southern cities and the coal-mining districts which had the heaviest concentrations of Chinese. Numerous attempts were made to limit Chinese economic activities by imposing heavy taxes on their businesses, and restricting them to certain districts of Alberta cities.[17]

Because of their smaller numbers, the Japanese escaped the brunt of Alberta's anti-Orientalism. In 1911 there were only 247 Japanese in the province.[18] Nonetheless, the announcement in 1908 that a colony of fifty Japanese farmers would be established at Gleichen met with intense hostility. As a result, only a few of the would-be sugar beet farmers settled in the area.[19]

Anti-Orientalism in Alberta consisted merely of small isolated disturbances directed against a tiny minority group. Yet it has significance for this thesis. The Alberta response to the Chinese and Japanese suggests how little tolerance existed in the province for non-white immigration. As well, the Oriental presence in the province served to sensitize the population to non-white immigrants. Albertans would be on guard against future influxes of Orientals or any other non-whites.

Ostensibly, Alberta's and British Columbia's opposition to Asian immigration was economic in origin, the result of working class fears of cheap Asian labour. Indeed, trade unions and working class demagogues were usually prominent among the leaders of anti-Oriental agitation. But a closer look will reveal a deeper psychological cause, derived from the racism and ethnocentrism which permeated every level of Canadian society. Canadians had developed a detailed and contemptuous mental image of the characteristics of each non-white group. To a large extent these racial images were derived from traditional European and North American views developed as a result of generations of commercial, diplomatic and missionary contacts.[20] These images were reinforced by subsequent Canadian experience with members of the groups.

China's isolated feudal society seemed exotic and decadent to most 18th and 19th century observers. A popular belief developed in western Europe that ignorance, perversity, cruelty and poverty were common characteristics of Chinese society.[21] Residents of British Columbia and Alberta embellished this derogatory image with observations of their own. The Chinese were believed to be untroubled by over-crowded housing and unsanitary conditions. They were seen as disease-ridden, inclined to drug addiction, gambling, theft, and on the distaff side, to prostitution. Chinatowns were viewed by Canadians as centres of vice and depravity, places where the bizarre mingled with the disgusting. Canadians were also convinced that the Chinese contributed almost nothing to their adopted land, that they sent all their money home to relatives in China.[22]

The Japanese suffered equally from the common belief that all Asian peoples were unclean, diseased, and a threat to public health. But Japan's rapid modernization and aggressive military stance made immigrants from that nation seem doubly sinister. Most Canadians were convinced that the Japanese were intensely patriotic and loyal only to Japan, a potential fifth column of spies and saboteurs in the event of war.[23]

That Canadians did not hesitate to accept racial stereotypes based on hearsay, exaggeration and ignorance is clearly shown by the Asian immigrant experience. These stereotypes provided Canadians with ample fodder to form their opposition to Asian immigration, an opposition which relied more heavily on emotion than reason and was motivated not so much by fear of economic dislocation as from simple racial prejudice.

Perhaps the Canadian penchant for unquestioning acceptance of stereotypes derived from the experience of other nations is most striking in the case of blacks. In 1901, Canada had a substantial community of 17,437 blacks, the vast majority centred in Ontario and Nova Scotia.[24] Yet despite having this domestic experience to draw upon, Canadians seemed to prefer to import their views of blacks from the United States. During the period 1870-1910, the Canadian opinion of blacks deteriorated drastically, in part as a result of the increasing racism of the times, but fuelled as well by a massive immigration of white Americans and the lurid portrayals of blacks common to American publications circulating in Canada.[25] The Canadian attitude towards blacks changed from passive acceptance to active dislike as negative stereotypes which emphasized the race's supposed characteristics of criminality, love of pleasure, unusual sexual appetites, offensive odour, laziness and general unreliability became widely accepted.[26] From their southern neighbors, Canadians adopted the notion that blacks represented the sort of threat to morality and womanly virtue illustrated in a passage written by an American in 1901,

> When a knock is heard on the door (the Southern woman) shudders with nameless horror. The black brute is lurking in the dark, a monstrous beast, crazed with lust. His fury is demoniacal. A mad bull or a tiger could scarcely be more brutal. A whole community is frenzied with horror, with the blind and furious rage for vengeance.[27]

The Canadian belief in black criminality is reflected in the prison statistics. In 1911, blacks formed only .23% of the Canadian population, yet almost 3% of convicts were black.[28] To these American stereotypes, Canadians added their own bit of folk wisdom, that since American blacks originated in equatorial climes, they were unadapted for survival in cold climates.[29]

Given these convictions, it is not surprising that the average Canadian was not eager to have black neighbors. But Canadians feared the immigration of blacks and other non-white peoples for yet another reason, a firm conviction that racial conflict and violence would be an inevitable consequence. Canadians viewed the escalating racial problems of the United States with combined feelings of horror and moral superiority.[30] Slavery and the racial degeneration and conflict which accompanied it was a southern phenomenon, they claimed, inherently unnatural to northern climates. Nevertheless, Canadians were unwilling to test their immunity to the 'American virus' of racial prejudice. Given the presence of a substantial body of blacks, Canadians did not trust themselves not to discriminate, to become as racist as the American society they deplored.[31] The most logical means of forestalling this situation was to stop it at its source, by preventing blacks from entering the country.

The prospect of a multi-racial society inevitably elicited demands for a racially restrictive immigration policy. Few Canadians believed that assimilation, the panacea for immigration from eastern and southern Europe, was possible or even desirable for the growing numbers of non-white newcomers. Canadians believed that racial characteristics were permanent and immutable, the color barrier alone being enough to prevent the social assimilation of Asian or black immigrants. And the idea of the biological assimilation of these racial minorities through intermarriage with the Caucasian population evoked reactions of horror. It was commonly believed that intermarriage between such diverse racial types would produce a physically and mentally inferior mongrel race.[32] Most Canadians agreed that the only possible result of substantial non-white immigration would be the formation of a permanent alien presence and inevitable racial conflict. Wilfrid Laurier himself expressed this fear during his 1910 tour of western Canada,

> Nor should we allow too many Asiatics to enter. Nature has apparently prohibited their ready assimilation with us, and we see in the United States what grave problems may arise from the presence of a race unable to become full members of the same social family as ourselves.[33]

Rather than cope with the demands of multi-racialism, Canadians, even social reformers such as J.S. Woodsworth, opted for the easy answer of racial homogeneity through immigration restriction,:

> Ultimately then, the question resolves itself into the desirability of a white caste and a yellow, or black caste existing side by side, or above and below, in the same country. We confess that the idea of a homogenous people seems in accord with our democratic institutions and conducive to the general welfare...The idealist may still dream of a final state of development, when white and black and red and yellow shall have ceased to exist, or have become merged into some neutral grey. We may love all men and yet prefer to maintain our own family life.[34]

II - Theory into Action: The Development and Administration of Canadian Immigration Policy

The responsibility for interpreting Canada's immigration needs and putting them into action fell jointly upon the Minister of the Interior and the civil servants of the Immigration Branch. Large-scale settlement of western Canada coincided with the election of the Laurier government in 1896 and the appointment of Clifford Sifton as Minister of the Interior. Upon taking office, Sifton devoted his energies to the daunting task of peopling the west as quickly and as successfully as possible. To this end he continued the policy of relatively unrestricted European immigration initiated by his Conservative predecessors, often resisting public sentiment which called for a more careful selection of immigrants. Prime Minister Laurier also favored the "open door" approach to immigration. His classical liberal philosophy made the idea of discrimination repugnant. And on a practical level, he was fully aware of the enormous political power of those business tycoons whose wealth was based on labour intensive industries.[35] In 1896, entry to Canada was forbidden only to the diseased, the criminal and those likely to become a public charge. These conditions applied only to immigrants arriving at ocean ports; those crossing the border from the United States were unhindered.[36] Sifton's only further discrimination applicable to European immigrants was embodied in the Alien Labour Act of 1897, intended to discourage the admittance to Canada of labourers and other urban-bound immigrants.[37] Determined that the destination of most immigrants would be the empty prairie and parkland of Manitoba and the North-West Territories, Sifton was anxious to receive only those with agricultural backgrounds. The nationality, culture and language of the immigrants were secondary considerations. The aim of Sifton's liberal immigration policy is well illustrated by a statement made in 1900 by James Smart, Deputy Minister of the Interior,

> If a settler is one who has been engaged in agricultural pursuits in the old land, is possessed of his full faculties, steady, honest, sober and willing to work whether he be rich or poor, Galician, Austrian, Russian, Swede, Belgian or French, we believe it most desirable to encourage him to occupy our land and to break up our soil and assist in developing the resources of the country and in this way enrich himself and Canada.[38]

The Immigration Branch, under Sifton's direction, also made very generous provisions for the establishment of ethnic and religious group settlements, sponsoring such diverse groups as the Mormons, Mennonites and Doukhobors. The latter two sects were granted a number of special privileges, including exemption from military service and the right to hold their land communally.[39]

But while Sifton was willing to tolerate the peculiarities of European religious groups, he was reluctant to admit large numbers of non-white immigrants. During his period in office, the government was under great pressure from British Columbia to introduce stronger restrictions on Chinese immigration. The 1885 Chinese Immigration Act, Canada's first racially discriminatory immigration legislation, had imposed a $50 head tax on Chinese immigrants and permitted ships to bring in only one Chinese per fifty tons of ship's weight.[40] In 1900, Prime Minister Laurier responded to the urgings of west coast residents by raising the head tax to $100 and appointing a Royal Commission to investigate the problem of Chinese immigration.[41] Acting on the Commission's recommendations, the Government raised the head tax to $500 in 1903 and entrenched it in the new Chinese Immigration Act of 1904, exempting only diplomats, merchants, scientists, students and Canadian-born Chinese.[42]

The mammoth task of implementing the Laurier government's immigration policies fell to the Immigration Branch which Sifton had organized and staffed with his political allies and fellow westerners. The responsibilities of the Immigration Branch lay in two broad areas: attracting immigrants to Canada and settling them successfully. To fulfill the first of these obligations the Branch conducted an aggressive publicity campaign in Britain, Europe and the United States. Traditionally, immigration activities in Britain were controlled by the High Commission. Finding this arrangement unsatisfactory, the Immigration Branch established its own office in London in 1903 and soon opened branch offices throughout the country. As a result, immigration from Britain rose rapidly from 11,800 in 1901 to 123,000 in 1911.[43]

Recruiting immigrants from continental Europe proved more difficult. Most European nations were reluctant to see their citizens depart and severely restricted Canadian immigration activities. The French government, for example, actively campaigned against emigration while Germany outlawed Canadian immigration agents and established heavy license fees for ships carrying immigrants.[44] Nevertheless, the Immigration Branch emerged victorious as total European immigration increased from 19,352 in 1901 to 58,000 in 1911.[45]

Much of the Immigration Branch's success in attracting immigrants to western Canada resulted from changing international political and economic circumstances. The rapid pace of industrialization and urbanization in the United States and Europe produced sharp increases in the price of raw materials, particularly food. Concomitantly, a significant decline in trans-Atlantic freight rates kept the price of Canadian grain competitive on the world market. These advantageous circumstances coincided with the development of rapidly maturing strains of wheat, new dry-land farming techniques and improved agricultural machinery; scientific advances which greatly increased the grain-producing potential of western Canada. And finally, demographic pressures in Europe and Britain and the imposition of harsh restrictions on minority groups in the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires swelled the numbers of potential immigrants. Given a choice, most of these people would undoubtedly have chosen to settle in the United States. But the diminishing availability of American homestead lands made western Canada seem an attractive alternative. Undoubtedly, it was the fortunate coincidence of these external factors during the 1890s and early 1900s which virtually guaranteed the success of the Immigration Branch's campaign in Britain and Europe.[46]

The Immigration Branch was also very active in the United States, concentrating its efforts on attracting farmers from the prairies and mid-west. Already familiar with the conditions of prairie agriculture and dry land farming techniques, they were expected to be extremely successful farmers and a good example for settlers from Europe and eastern Canada. By the beginning of the century, economic opportunities for American farmers were diminishing rapidly. As the supply of free homestead land dwindled, land prices skyrocketed. In North Dakota and South Dakota, for example, land values increased 321% and 377% respectively between the years 1900-1910.[47] Farmers could no longer afford to enlarge their holdings or purchase nearby farms for their grown sons.

The Immigration Branch acted quickly to turn this situation to Canada's advantage. By 1904, Canadian Government Agents were established in eighteen offices across the American mid-west and plains. An extensive advertising campaign was launched in the rural and agricultural press, reaching over 7,000 newspapers by 1902.[48] The newspaper advertisements which extolled, and often exaggerated, the fertility and favorable climate of the Canadian West, were accompanied by a blizzard of pamphlets, the most famous being 'The Last Best West'. Other publicity techniques included exhibits of Canadian agricultural produce at county fairs and special free tours of western Canada for newspaper editors, groups of farmers and delegates of American ethnic groups.[49] A final inducement to prospective American immigrants was the greatly reduced transportation rates offered by the Immigration Branch in cooperation with the Canadian Pacific Railway. Canadian Government Agents operating in the United States issued to intending settlers 'Canadian Land Seeker's Certificates' which, when presented to CPR station agents, allowed the bearer to travel at the rate of .01¢ per mile.[50]

Largely as a result of Immigration Branch activities, immigration from the United States rose from 17,987 in 1901 to reach a peak of 121,451 in 1911.[51] Most of these immigrants were American-born, but a substantial number were Europeans, Scandinavian or German for the most part, who had settled only briefly in the United States.[52] The impact of this heavy American immigration was greatest in Alberta and Saskatchewan where Americans made 40% of the homestead entries during the years between 1907 and 1915.[53]

Aside from their knowledge of prairie agriculture, American immigrants were especially welcome because of their wealth. In 1909, the average American brought with him an estimated $811 worth of cash, household goods and agricultural equipment. By 1911 the figure had risen to $1539.[54] In contrast, European immigrants were much poorer, possessing in 1909, according to an estimate by J.S. Woodsworth, amounts of capital ranging from $41.51 for Scots to a low of $9.94 for immigrants from Poland.[55]

The immense increases in immigration from Britain, Europe, and the United States during the first decade of the century are indicative of the tremendous success of the publicity campaign conducted by Sifton's efficiently organized Immigration Branch. In 1905, Sifton resigned from the Cabinet following a dispute about education in Alberta and Saskatchewan. His successor, Frank Oliver, was an outspoken critic of unrestricted immigration. An Edmontonian with a reputation as a political firebrand, Oliver had believed as early as the 1880s that immigration should be closely regulated, that only 'quality' immigrants from Britain and the United States should be sought. Much of Oliver's hostility in his pre-Ministerial days was directed at the Eastern Europeans who were settling in the choice parkland near Edmonton,

> ...there is nothing (the westerners) more earnestly resent than the idea of settling up the country with people who will be a drag on our civilization and progress. We did not go out to that country simply to produce wheat. We went to build up a nation, a civilization, a social system that we could enjoy, be proud of and transmit to our children; and we resent the idea of having the millstone of this Slav population hung around our necks in our efforts to build up, beautify and improve the country and so improve the whole of Canada.[56]

Once in office, Oliver immediately transformed his opposition to Sifton's unrestricted immigration policy into legislation. In 1906 an entirely revamped Immigration Act was introduced. Principal clauses of the Act enlarged and more clearly defined the types of immigrants liable to rejection and deportation. Entry to Canada was forbidden to the feeble-minded, epileptic or insane as well as to those suffering from contagious, infectious or 'loathsome' diseases. Significantly, the Act did not define the term 'loathsome' disease, presumably leaving it to the discretion of the Minister or the immigration official at the scene. Also in a prohibited class of immigrants, unless accompanying or joining family members, were the deaf and dumb, blind and infirm. Prostitutes or persons convicted of crimes involving moral turpitude were similarly banned as were paupers, vagrants, and those deemed likely to become a public charge. Moreover, the latter three conditions became grounds not only for rejection but also for subsequent deportation.[57]

It was not merely this lengthened list of prohibited immigrants which made the 1906 Act truly restrictive. The essence of the legislation was the unprecedented arbitrary power it assigned to the Minister of the Interior. The Minister was authorized by section 30 of the Act to issue Orders in Council "to prohibit the landing in Canada of any specified class of immigrants". Section 20 empowered him to impose minimum financial requirements for immigrants "which amount may vary according to the class and destination of such immigrant and otherwise according to circumstances."[58] These clauses allowed a new emphasis to be placed on racial or ethnocultural restrictions. At will, the Minister could require certain groups to possess greater than average amounts of money or could entirely ban them from entering the country for an unspecified length of time.

For the most part, the restrictive measures in the 1906 Immigration Act were aimed at curtailing undesirable immigration from Europe. The sections related to the inspection and medical examination of immigrants applied only to those arriving at ocean ports. Immigrants who entered Canada by train were still unimpeded. In time, this became a loophole for Europeans who, fearing rejection by Canadian immigration officials, began landing in the United States as tourists and then crossing the border into Canada. To halt this traffic, Oliver instituted a medical and character inspection of immigrants at American border crossing points beginning in 1908.[59] While originally aimed at Europeans, these examinations would become the principal means of excluding blacks from Canada.

Although Oliver's personal animosities were directed primarily at Eastern Europeans, he certainly sympathized with Canadians who were intent on keeping Canada 'a white man's country'. As Minister of the Interior, he introduced a number of imaginative measures aimed at limiting non-white immigration. By the middle of the decade, the pressure from British Columbia for the imposition of measures to stem the rising tide of Japanese immigration had become intense. Ottawa hesitated, fearing that the imposition of anti-Japanese legislation would violate the Anglo-Japanese treaty of 1894 and injure diplomatic and trade relations between the mother country and Japan. Finally though, a tactful solution was found. In 1908 a 'gentlemen's agreement' was concluded with the government of Japan, limiting the immigration of Japanese labourers to 150 per year.[60]

In the same year, Mackenzie King was sent to the west coast to investigate the troublesome problem of East Indian immigration. He concluded that the native of India was by nature unsuited to the rigorous Canadian climate:

> ...their inability to readily adapt themselves to surroundings entirely different could not do other than entail an amount of privation and suffering which render a discontinuance of such immigration most desirable in the interests of the Indians themselves.[61]

But India, a fellow member of the British Empire, was another nation which Ottawa was anxious not to offend. Consequently, an oblique path was chosen to end the Indian influx. Section 30 of the 1906 Immigration Act was amended, allowing the Minister of the Interior to prohibit the landing in Canada "of any immigrants who have come to Canada otherwise than by continuous journey from the country of which they are natives or citizens and upon through tickets purchased in that country."[62] Since there existed no means by which a continuous journey from India to Canada could be accomplished, this amendment proved a simple and effective solution to the problem of Indian immigration. It also, by happy coincidence, curtailed the movement of Japanese to Canada via the Hawaiian Islands. But needless to say, the 'continuous journey' regulation did not hinder the arrival of European-born immigrants from the United States.

Those few Indians and Asians who still managed to find their way into Canada became subject to yet another discriminatory measure in June 1908. Oliver enacted an Order in Council under Section 20 of the Immigration Act which required Asian immigrants to have $200 in their possession when they entered Canada.[63] This measure applied to all Asians except those from countries with which Canada had special arrangements or those to whom special statutes applied, namely the Japanese and Chinese.

Immigration levels dropped abruptly with the imposition of each new sanction. The number of Chinese immigrants had fallen from a high of 5,245 in 1903 to a low of eight in 1904-05 after the $500 head tax came into effect.[64] The "gentlemen's agreement" brought about a decline in Japanese immigration from 7,601 in 1908 to 271 in 1910. The amendment to the Immigration Act in 1908 which required a continuous journey to Canada from the country of birth caused the number of East Indian immigrants to drop from 2,623 in 1908 to six in 1909.[65]

Some of the measures directed against non-white immigrants were incorporated into Oliver's even more restrictive Immigration Act of 1910. The new Act more specifically defined the prohibited classes of immigrants and enlarged the list to include immigrants to whom money had been given or loaned by a charitable organization as well as persons who

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Page 34 of "Alberta's Black Settlers: A Study of Canadian Immigration Policy and Practise" by Judith Hill is not missing, but has been misnumbered.

advocated the overthrow of lawful authority. For the first time, race was specifically noted as a classification factor for immigration to Canada. Section 37 of the Act specified that the amount of money immigrants or tourists were required to possess, "may vary according to the race, occupation or destination of such immigrant and tourist, and otherwise according to the circumstances." Section 38(c) allowed the Minister to prohibit

> for a stated period or permanently, the landing in Canada, or the landing at any specified port of entry in Canada, of immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada, or immigrants of any specified class, occupation or character.[66]

These clauses gave the Minister of the Interior and Immigration Branch officials an extreme degree of latitude with which to make decisions regarding the desirability of different types of immigrants. The Minister was quite free, if he chose, to reject an immigrant arbitrarily solely on the basis of his race, colour or nationality.

The primary object of the 1910 Act, as explained by Frank Oliver, was to prevent undesirable immigrants from crossing into Canada from the United States.

> When the Act of 1906 was introduced, it was framed with a view of dealing with immigrants from overseas. Although it applied to immigrants from across the line, it was especially framed to meet other conditions. Now it has become necessary to make similar provision for the exclusion of undesirables along the ... frontier between Canada and the United States.[67]

The major target of the Act was undoubtedly those unsavory Europeans who persisted in slipping across the border into

Canada. But it is quite possible that some of the restrictive clauses of the legislation, particularly those which refer to race and suitability to the Canadian climate, were drafted in response to the prospect of increased interest in western Canada on the part of American blacks.

Much of the restrictive legislation introduced by Oliver was a product of his own prejudices and his personal interpretation of Canada's immigration needs. But he was undoubtedly influenced by the significant pressure being exerted by a number of disparate organizations and elements of society. The Conservative Party frequently accused the government of sponsoring 'quantity rather than quality' immigration. The 1908 Conservative platform called for a rigid inspection of immigrants, strict naturalization and franchise requirements, and careful selection of "the very best class of settlers from the British Islands, from the United States and from chosen and selected races of Continental Europe."[68] During the federal election of that year, Conservative candidates in British Columbia and southern Alberta appealed to the labour vote by campaigning under a 'White Canada' banner.[69] This stance was likely approved by labour organizations, such as the Trades and Labour Congress, which feared the economic competition of immigrants, particularly Orientals. Numerous patriotic associations and Protestant religious groups also pressured the government to bring in stricter legislation as did French Canadian nationalists who objected to all non-French immigration.[70]

Of course, public sentiment itself was a major deciding factor. Most of the restraints placed on Oriental immigration were a direct result of the agitation and demands of British Columbians. And elsewhere in the west, indeed throughout all of Canada, the tide of public opinion was running strongly in favor of a more selective immigration policy. Most Canadians would doubtless have enthusiastically applauded Frank Oliver when he told Parliament that the 1910 Immigration Act gave Canada "a policy of restrictive and selective immigration probably more drastic than that imposed by any other country in the world."[71]

Oliver's boasting aside, Canada had formidable competition for this dubious distinction. Concern over the quality of immigration, particularly the rising numbers of Asian immigrants, characterized all the major immigrant-receiving nations during this period. Antagonism against the Chinese had developed early in the gold fields of Australia and New Zealand for much the same reasons as in Canada: economic competition and fears that the exotic Orientals could not be assimilated. By 1890, both countries had virtually prohibited Chinese immigration and had introduced numerous discriminatory laws related to naturalization, employment, landholding and voting.[72]

In response to a later East Indian influx, Australia implemented an education test which, although theoretically applied to all immigrants was actually administered only to Asians. Thus, Australia was able to exclude all but two or three Asian immigrants each year. Finally in 1905, Australia introduced an Immigration Restriction Act which prevented the wives and children of Asian immigrants from entering the country.[73]

Restrictive immigration was popular also in the United States. In 1875, the immigration of convicts, prostitutes and Orientals was restricted and citizenship was reserved for whites and those of African descent. Additional legislation to restrict the Chinese was passed in 1882, 1893, 1898 and 1902. Finally in 1904, the immigration of Chinese labourers was suspended indefinitely.[74] In response to rising Japanese immigration, the American government took the same action as Canada, entering a 'gentlemen's agreement' with Japan which restricted the number of Japanese entering the United States.[75]

Thus by the end of the first decade of the century, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada had almost closed the door on non-white immigration. Never was there a less propitious time for large numbers of blacks to contemplate coming to Canada.

Footnotes

[1] George M. Fredrickson, The Black Image in the White Mind, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 231.

[2] Ibid., p. 322.

[3] Robert A. Huttenback, Racism and Empire, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 20.

[4] James S. Woodsworth, Strangers Within Our Gates, (Toronto: F.C. Stephen, 1909, reprint ed., Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 1972), p. XIV.

[5] Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, eds, Canada and its Provinces, Vol. VII: Political Evolution, (Toronto: Glasgow & Brook, 1914), p. 590.

[6] W. Peter Ward, White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia, (Montreal: Queen's University Press, 1978), p. 31.

[7] Howard Palmer, "Responses to Foreign Immigration: Nativism and Ethnic Tolerance in Alberta, 1880 - 1920." (M.A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1971), p. 58.

[8] Ibid., p. 102.

[9] Ibid., p. 138.

[10] Ward, White Canada Forever, p. 169.

[11] Howard Palmer, "Anti-Oriental Sentiment in Alberta 1880-1920," Canadian Ethnic Studies (1970), p. 35.

[12] Canada Yearbook, 1901, p. 611.

[13] Donald Avery, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the Alien Question, 1896-1919: The Anglo-Canadian Perspective," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1973). p. 37.

[14] Ward, White Canada Forever, pp. 67-70.

[15] Census of Canada, 1891, vol. 1, p. 362; Canada Yearbook, 1912, p. 47.

[16] Palmer, "Anti-Oriental Sentiment in Alberta," p. 32.

[17] Ibid., p. 36.

[18] Census of Canada, 1911, vol. 2, p. 163.

[19] Palmer, "Anti-Oriental Sentiment in Alberta," p. 43.

[20] Ward, White Canada Forever, p. 7.

[21] Ibid., p. 4.

[22] Palmer, "Anti-Oriental Sentiment in Alberta," p. 36.

[23] Ward, White Canada Forever, p. 105.

[24] Census of Canada, 1901, vol. 1, p. 285.

[25] Harold Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, (Toronto: Griffen House, 1972), p. 122.

[26] Robin W. Winks, The Blacks in Canada, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 298.

[27] Huttenback, Racism and Empire, p. 20.

[28] Census of Canada, 1921, vol. 1, p. 464; Canada Yearbook, 1914, p. 173.

[29] Winks, Blacks in Canada, p. 297.

[30] Robin W. Winks, "The Canadian Negro: A Historical Assessment, Part 1, The Negro in the Canadian-American Relationship", Journal of Negro History, (1968), p. 295.

[31] Ibid., p. 295.

[32] Fredrickson, Black Image in the White Mind, p. 321.

[33] Wilfrid Laurier Papers, p. 217899, c.1173, vol. 764, Public Archives of Canada.

[34] Woodsworth, Strangers Within Our Gates, pp. 230-231.

[35] Avery, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the Alien Question", p. 7.

[36] Palmer, "Responses to Foreign Immigration", p. 170.

[37] Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, p. 7. The Alien Labour Act was introduced in retaliation against similar legislation in the United States and was not regularly enforced.

[38] Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, Canada 1896 - 1921: A Nation Transformed, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 56.

[39] Ibid., p. 64.

[40] Ward, White Canada Forever, p. 40.

[41] W.G. Smith, A Study in Canadian Immigration, (Toronto: Ryerson, 1920), p. 167.

[42] Ward, White Canada Forever, p. 61; Statutes of Canada. Chinese Immigration Act, 3 Edw. 7, c.8 s.1.

[43] Brown and Cook, Canada: A Nation Transformed, p. 57; Canada Yearbook, 1912, p. 43.

[44] Brown and Cook, Canada: A Nation Transformed, p. 62.

[45] Canada Yearbook, 1905, p. 316; Canada Yearbook, 1912, p. 43.

[46] Brown and Cook, Canada: A Nation Transformed, pp.50-54.

[47] Karel Denis Bicha, "The Plains Farmer and the Prairie Provinces Frontier, 1897-1914", Journal of Economic History (1965), p. 7.

[48] Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, p. 82.

[49] Ibid., p. 106.

[50] James B. Hedges, Building the Canadian West, (New York: MacMillan, 1939), p. 140.

[51] Canada Yearbook, 1905, p. 316; Canada Yearbook, 1912, p. 43.

[52] Brown and Cook, Canada: A Nation Transformed, p. 62.

[53] Palmer, "Responses to Foreign Immigration", p. 58.

[54] Karel Denis Bicha, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the American Farmer, 1896-1914", (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1963), p. 137.

[55] Woodsworth, Strangers Within Our Gates, p. 183.

[56] Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, p. 22.

[57] Statutes of Canada, The Immigration Act, 6 Edw. 7, c.19 s.1.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, p. 23.

[60] Charles Price, "'White' Restrictions on 'Coloured' Immigration.", Race, (January, 1966), p. 227.

[61] Smith, A Study in Canadian Immigration, p. 161.

[62] Statutes of Canada, An Act to Amend the Immigration Act, 7-8 Edw. 7. c.33.

[63] Canada Gazette, 1908, vol. XLi. p. 3276.

[64] Canada Sessional Papers, 1915 , No.25, Vol. 19, Part II, p. 82.

[65] Canada Yearbook, 1912, p. 43.

[66] Statutes of Canada, The Immigration Act, 9-10 Edw. 7, c.47.

[67] Palmer, "Responses to Foreign Immigration", p.175.

[68] D. Owen Carrigan, Canadian Party Platforms 1867-1968, (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1968), p. 54.

[69] Palmer, "Anti-Oriental Sentiment in Alberta", p.39.

[70] Palmer, "Responses to Foreign Immigration", p.171.

[71] House of Commons Debates, 1911-12, Vol. I, 30 November 1911, col. 608.

[72] Price "'White' Restrictions on 'Coloured' Immigration", p. 218.

[73] Ibid., p. 218.

[74] Thomas Curran, Xenophobia and Immigration 1820-1930, (Boston: Twayne, 1975), p. 89.

[75] Price, "'White' Restrictions on 'Coloured' Immigration", p. 223.

CHAPTER 3: Blacks in the American South, 1880-1910: A Tradition of Migration

Ironically, just as Canadian alarm over undesirable immigration reached its peak, black Americans were becoming increasingly interested in the northern dominion. During the decades following the Civil War, the social, economic and political position of blacks in the southern United States deteriorated alarmingly. At first, during the ten year period of reconstruction, black Americans had anticipated a bright future. In the shattered social structure of the south, relations between the newly emancipated slaves and their former masters were undefined. It was not yet clear what position blacks would occupy in the new order, and for a time, they enjoyed an unprecedented equality. Taking advantage of their new political power, blacks voted in large numbers, served as judges and jurors and were elected to state legislatures.[1] However, economic and social progress proved more elusive. Blacks were held back both by the sluggish post-war economy and the unwillingness of whites to accept them as social equals. It was not long before many southern whites began to demand the removal of blacks from politics, fearful that they would use the vote as a means of bettering their position in society. The agitation for disfranchisement began first in those localities where blacks outnumbered whites. From there it rapidly spread throughout the south, bringing an abrupt end to the initial period of political equality. In 1890, Mississippi became the first state to deny blacks the right to vote. Other states soon followed suit; South Carolina in 1895, Louisiana in 1898, Alabama and Virginia in 1901 and Georgia in 1908.[2] Disfranchisement was easily accomplished by means of an amendment to the state constitution or the imposition of property or literacy qualifications. As well, each southern state imposed a poll tax as a further means of reducing the number of eligible black voters. The disfranchisement campaign proved very effective. Mississippi succeeded in reducing its black voters from 250,000 to less than 77,000. In Louisiana, the drop-off was even more dramatic. There were 130,344 black voters registered in the 1896 national election and only 5,320 in 1900.[3] In a few short years, southern blacks found themselves politically helpless, unable to vote, stand for election or serve on juries. Even their old friend, the Republican Party which had emancipated them, showed no interest in their plight.

Economic factors hastened the rapid decline of the black in southern society. The agriculturally based southern economy was almost completely dependent on one crop: cotton. During the post-war years, cotton prices plummetted from .30¢ a pound in 1866 to .06¢ in 1893.[4] Southern blacks, sharecroppers and tenant farmers for the most part, were hard hit by this lengthy agricultural depression. By the 1880s, white farmers were also struggling. Although previously better off than the blacks, they were reduced to the subsistence level and forced into economic competition with blacks on equal terms. Seething with indignation, the south sought a scapegoat. Inevitably, many whites vented their frustration through ruthless mob violence, directed primarily at helpless blacks. Beatings and lynchings became common occurrences. During 1900, the worst year for lynchings, 106 blacks died at the hands of white mobs.[5]

The campaigns of terrorism and political disfranchisement were countenanced by most southern whites. During the 1890s, blacks were further humiliated by the introduction of a series of segregation laws which severely restricted their social and economic opportunities. Louisiana was the first to implement segregation. The state legislature in 1890 introduced a law for "separate but equal" racial accommodation on public transportation. This measure was declared valid by the United States Supreme Court in 1896 in the first of a series of decisions which paved the way for segregation.[6] More "Jim Crow" laws quickly followed, each aimed at pushing the black further down. By 1900, segregation was the rule across the south in streetcars, trains, housing, hotels, and restaurants. Certain states also segregated steamboats, jails, hospitals, mental institutions, orphanages, factory workrooms, theatres, public parks, libraries, churches, toilets and drinking fountains. The reluctance of whites to mix with blacks often reached ridiculous proportions. For example, in Chicago in 1912, four white murderers, sentenced to be hanged at the same time as a black murderer, demanded segregated scaffolds.[8]

The purportedly "separate but equal" terms of segregation were a notorious farce. Almost without exception, facilities reserved for blacks were of vastly inferior quality. The education system provides a good example. Black schools were invariably dilapidated, dirty, overcrowded one room buildings staffed by teachers who were poorly educated and miserably underpaid. Such inequities were characteristic of all public institutions. The legal system was particularly well known for its discrimination against black offenders. Blacks would often be arrested for little cause. When taken to court, they were locked up for outrageously long terms for the most trivial of offenses.[9]

For most blacks, the myriad informal restrictive customs of the south were just as odious as the segregation laws themselves. A black was permitted to enter a white home only by the back door. He always addressed white people respectfully as Mr. or Mrs., did not engage in sports or games with them, and on encountering a white man on the street, removed his hat and stepped off the pavement to let him pass.[10]

During the years between 1880 and 1910, southern blacks reached the nadir of degradation and despair. Rarely did a day pass without bringing fresh humiliating or terrifying evidence of their inferior position in society.

Undoubtedly most southern blacks would have applauded Bishop Henry Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church when, in light of the "lynchings, murders, and outrages perpetrated upon our people and the absolute powerlessness of the President of the United States and the powerlessness of the civil and federal laws", he condemned the United States as "the worst, the meanest country on the face of the earth".[11]

Throughout the south, blacks adopted a variety of responses to their situation. Most resolved to accept the hardships of their inferior status. This attitude was encouraged by the emerging black leader, Booker T. Washington, who urged his people to work hard, become wealthy and thereby gain the respect of white society.[12] Other blacks, less patient or less desirous of winning white applause, developed a sense of black nationalism and a desire to take more radical measures to better their condition.

The new spirit of black nationalism took a variety of forms. The most pessimistic of the nationalist leaders had lost faith completely in American institutions and advocated emigration as the only possible solution. As early as the 1870s American blacks had shown interest in emigration to Liberia and Sierra Leone, the black "natural homeland". Unfortunately, African emigration was a frustrating, costly and hazardous undertaking. Consequently, the efforts of most Africa promoters met with failure, or at best, only partial success. Nevertheless, by 1910, well over 1,000 American blacks had settled in Liberia alone.[13]

For the most part, emigration to Africa appealed to poorer blacks. Those with means were largely opposed to the movement. To attract these more cautious individuals, black leaders and emigration promoters developed a number of less ambitious emigration schemes. Favored destinations included the Caribbean, Canada, Mexico and Brazil. One promoter led several thousand blacks into Mexico in 1895.[14] The files of Clifford Sifton's Immigration Branch disclose other evidence of the efforts of emigrationists. For example, in 1901, Barney McKay of the Afro-American Literary Bureau offered to provide Canada with 5,000 black males, all "thrifty, hardy agriculturalists" who will "build up the waste places in Canada and make the barren fields and primitive forests blossom like the rose".[15] A year later, an Atlanta watchmaker informed Sifton that,

> a plan is being inaugurated to induce the best element of the Negroes of Georgia to emigrate to Canada and take up homesteads....The plan contemplated is to get a sufficient number to emigrate to organize a colony and it is estimated that a company of 1000 of the most industrious negroes can be enlisted.[16]

Some writers unwittingly revealed an almost humorous lack of knowledge of Canadian conditions. One Pennsylvanian black, for example, proposed establishing one hundred black families on the shores of Hudson Bay where they would be close to the "great commercial centres of the Maritime provinces".[17] Nothing resulted from these grandiose schemes, nor indeed from most of the other efforts to settle black Americans abroad. Financial resources were too limited, distances and organizational problems too great and the Canadian government and white southerners too uncooperative. However unsuccessful their efforts, the blandishments of emigration promoters at least caught the imagination of southern blacks. Consequently, increasing numbers of blacks decided to pull up stakes and leave the south in search of new opportunities within their own country. Between 1890 and 1910, close to 200,000 blacks migrated to the industrial cities of the north.[18] Many thousands more opted for the prairie grasslands of the newly opened south-western states of Kansas, Arkansas, Texas and Oklahoma. While some migrants hoped to exchange sharecropping for farm ownership or lucrative employment, most were simply fleeing the increasing racism and violence of the south. Since white southerners resented losing their labour force, the violence often pursued them even as they prepared to leave their homes.[19]

Kansas was the first south-western state to attract the attention of blacks. Beginning in 1878, a number of large groups of blacks from Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas and Tennessee arrived in Kansas, increasing the black population of the state from 16,250 in 1870 to 43,110 in 1880.[20]

The Kansas migration has significance for this thesis because it served as a prototype. One of its most striking aspects was its organization. Although occasionally enthusiasm triumphed over common sense, on the whole the movement was effectively directed by its black secular leaders.

Emigration clubs were formed and carefully investigated economic and social conditions in Kansas. Letters were written to the Governor and meetings were held to debate the pros and cons of migration. The unity and sense of purpose which the blacks displayed before and during the migration was carefully maintained after their arrival in Kansas. Seven all-black towns were established on the Kansas prairie, each a well-organized, self-sufficent community.[21]

For many of the black settlers, the migration to Kansas took on a strong millenarian flavour. The religious beliefs of American blacks during the late nineteenth century emphasized living out the Bible. Hence, many saw themselves not as migrants but as refugees fleeing oppression and bondage. Kansas was often referred to as the "Promised Land". It has been suggested that this reverence for the state resulted in part from the bloody conflict of the 1850s which made Kansas a free state. A black Louisianian wrote the Governor of Kansas,

> I am anxious to reach your state, not because of the great race now made for it but because of the sacredness of her soil washed by the blood of humanitarians for the cause of freedom.[22]

The millenarian aspects of the movement to Kansas did not seem to characterize other migrations to such an extent. Nevertheless, it is interesting to speculate whether a degree of such reverence underlay the later migration to Canada, widely known as the destination of the underground railway and the home of British justice.

During the 1890s, another massive migration of blacks took place. This time, the destination was another southwestern state: Oklahoma. The story of this movement, and of the development of Oklahoma itself, is rather complex but essential to this thesis.

As the 1890s commenced, the state of Oklahoma had not yet been formed. The eastern portion was occupied by the Indian Territory, the home since 1825 of the Five Civilized Tribes: the Creeks, Cherokees, Chocktaws, Seminoles and Chickasaws. To the west lay the largely uninhabited Oklahoma Territory. As the 1880s drew to a close, the American west was entering the last stage of homestead settlement. Even the dry prairie states of Kansas and Texas which bordered on Oklahoma, were rapidly filling as newcomers flooded in from the east. In response to this pressure, the American government decided in 1889 to open the Oklahoma Territory to homestead settlement. White and black Americans were equally attracted by the prospect of settlement in Oklahoma. In the south, black leaders had visions of another Kansas-style migration. They extolled the advantages of Oklahoma settlement to their people,

> There never was a more favorable time than now for you to secure good homes in a land where you will be free and your rights respected. Oklahoma is now open for settlement. The soil is rich, the climate favorable, water abundant and there is plenty of timber. Make a new start. Give yourselves and your children new chances in a new land where you will be able to think and vote as you please.[23]

To beleaguered blacks across the south, this was an exciting prospect. They responded with enthusiasm. "Oklahoma Clubs" sprang up in towns and cities across the south. In 1890 alone, over 7,000 blacks entered the Oklahoma Territory.[24]

"Oklahoma Fever" among southern blacks was to last for almost two decades. Much of the enthusiasm resulted from the efforts of one man, Edward P. McCabe, a black politician from Kansas. McCabe was an unusual character, a visionary with the energy and organizational ability to give substance to his dreams. McCabe envisioned Oklahoma as an all-black state. He hoped to achieve this goal by encouraging a massive migration which would establish a voting majority of blacks in each electoral district. Thus, blacks would achieve political dominance and the opportunity to establish a safe refuge for themselves within the United States. Of course, McCabe's motives were not entirely altruistic. He had ambitions of becoming the black state's first governor.[25]

Unfortunately for McCabe, the tide of white settlement could not be stemmed; blacks would never form more than a large minority of Oklahoma's population. Yet McCabe's work had some lasting results. He was a former resident of the all-black Kansas town of Nicodemus, and was responsible for the establishment of many similar communities in Oklahoma.

McCabe's first black Oklahoma town was Langston City, founded in 1890 some twelve miles north-east of Guthrie. Langston prospered from its inception, largely because of the hard work and cooperative spirit of its first residents. During the difficult first year of settlement, an eighty acre cooperative garden was planted to feed the inhabitants. But only a year later, Langston's 600 residents and the surrounding hinterland were served by six retail groceries, one wholesale grocery, two liquor stores, two blacksmiths, a feedstore and two barber shops. By 1893, a public school and a high school had been established as well as three churches.[26]

Undoubtedly, Langston's most influential institution was its newspaper, the Langston City Herald. McCabe used the Herald to carry the Oklahoma message to blacks across the south. He did not mince words when exhorting his people to move west,

> What will you be if you stay in the south? Slaves, liable to be killed at any time, and never treated right; but if you come to Oklahoma you will have equal chances with the white man.[27]

Yet not all blacks were welcome. McCabe was anxious to attract only the industrious and prosperous to Oklahoma,

> The facts are that we do not invite any to come here who have not sufficient means to bring themselves until such time as they can raise a crop... We think it is a mistake for any but self-supporting people to come here.[28]

To ensure that this elite group of blacks were well-prepared, each issue of the Herald contained extensive information about Oklahoma, including copies of the homesteading regulations.

The impact of the Herald's message is readily seen in the rapid growth of Oklahoma's black population. Between 1890 and 1910, the black population of Oklahoma multiplied sevenfold, reaching a total of 138,000.[29] At least twenty-five all-black towns dotted the Oklahoma prairie. One of them, the town of Clearview, is known to have become the source of a large migration to Alberta.

Not all of McCabe's towns were located in the Oklahoma Territory. As that territory rapidly filled up, black and white settiers began to overflow into the adjoining Indian Territory. Members of the Five Civilized Tribes watched as the unwelcome intruders took over large sections of their tribal lands. Exasperated by the tribal government which ruled the Indian territory, the white interlopers soon petitioned the federal government to seize control of the territory and open its lands to homestead settlement. In response, a commission was appointed to negotiate the extinguishing of the national title of the Five Civilized Tribes and to allot the tribal lands to individual Indians. By 1900, the government had reached agreement with all the tribes. Since the Five Civilized Tribes had formerly owned slaves, among the 300,000 claimants to tribal lands were 23,405 blacks. The amount of land distributed to this indigenous black population of Oklahoma differed according to tribe. The Creeks allotted 160 acres to each Indian and black citizen. The Cherokee tribe granted Indians and blacks 110 acres each while the Chocktaws allotted 320 acres to each Indian and only forty acres to each black.[30]

It is quite possible that the allotment of Indian lands brought yet another influx of blacks into the Indian Territory. Although most members of the tribes had been removed to Oklahoma in 1825, some remained behind on their original tribal lands in Tennessee and North Carolina and to a lesser extent, in Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. Living among these Indians were large numbers of blacks, formerly their slaves. Upon hearing of the distribution of Indian lands in Oklahoma, many of these blacks, especially those with Indian blood, may have moved into Oklahoma, hoping to share in the allotment.[31]

By the turn of the century, Oklahoma had a substantial black population. Most had hoped to find in the territories a refuge from the racism of the old south. For a time they were successful. Life in Oklahoma, though pervaded with a "Wild West" style of violence, was certainly more tolerant. But it was not to remain so for long. Both the white and Indian populations of the territories were opposed to extensive settlement by blacks. As the stream of black migrants threatened to become a flood, their tolerance wore thin.

Ironically, trouble erupted first between the blacks and the Indians. Relations between the tribes and their former slaves had been deteriorating for a long time. The Indians believed that the Civil War was the cause of most of their social and economic problems. Because one chief had supported the Confederacy, the tribes were treated harshly by the victorious federal government. Angered by this injustice, the Indians tended to place the blame on the blacks, over whom the war had been fought. And as more and more southern blacks intruded onto tribal lands the Indians' resentment grew. The Chocktaws, located in the south-east corner of the Indian Territory, were the first to take action. In 1891, the Lexington Leader reported the ejection of blacks from Chocktaw lands: "The Chocktaws are driving the Negroes out of that Nation. Anyone employing a coloured servant is subjected to a $50 fine."[32] Oklahoma's white population showed equal determination to force blacks out of the territories. In 1891, there were even disturbances in all-black Langston City.[33]

These racial problems were not yet serious, at least not compared to what the blacks had known in other states. Yet many blacks became so alarmed that they made plans to leave the United States entirely. During the 1890s, Oklahoma gave rise to a number of African emigration movements which attracted national attention. In 1897, Samuel Chapman of Muldrow in the Indian Territory attempted unsuccessfully to purchase a ship with black money, fill it with emigrants and send it to Liberia. Two years later, 104 blacks from Kingfisher County, Oklahoma Territory, hired a train and set out to New York to board a ship for Africa. Instead, they ended up in New Jersey, somewhat short of their original goal.[34]

For those blacks who remained in Oklahoma and for the thousands more still trooping into the state, the situation slowly deteriorated. Excerpts from Oklahoma newspapers of the period provide ready evidence of the growing opposition to black settlement,

> "Major H.C. Miller has issued a proclamation to the citizens of Sapulpa stating that if they are determined to rid the town of Negro population, let them do so in a peaceable, law-abiding manner." - The Indian Chieftain, August 29, 1901.
>
> "A vigilance committee of the citizens of Wawika posted notices to the Negroes to vacate the community within 24 hours." - The Beaver Journal, November 29 1902.
>
> "One Negro and one white man wounded in an effort of a number of whites to run negroes out of Claremore. The white man was wounded fatally." - The Cherokee Messenger, August, 1905.[35]

Nevertheless, blacks were still better off in Oklahoma than in the old south. As a territory, Oklahoma was under the direct administrative control of the federal government. Oklahomans were powerless to transform their racial prejudices into segregation or disfranchisement legislation. Blacks, though increasingly harassed, were still free to vote, to serve as jurors, and to travel, live and dine whereever they pleased. Moreover, their economic opportunities were almost unlimited. An industrious Oklahoma black might easily become an independent farmer or small businessman or enter the professions.[36]

But with the coming of statehood to Oklahoma all this was to change. In 1907, the Oklahoma Territory and the Indian Territory were united to form the nation's forty-sixth state. Almost immediately, the new governor introduced laws of segregation, commencing with streetcars and rapidly extending to include all forms of public transportation and accommodation, even telephone booths.[37] In 1910, a special session of the Oklahoma legislature was convened with the object of disfranchising black voters. A so-called "Grandfather clause" was added to the Oklahoma constitution which disallowed the voting of illiterates except those who were descendants of persons eligible to vote before January 1, 1866. The clear intention was to ensure the voting eligibility of illiterate whites while disfranchising illiterate blacks.[38]

Segregated and largely disfranchised, Oklahoma blacks found themselves reliving their previous experience in the old South. Most of them must have wondered why. Oklahoma whites could not use the traditional southern argument that political and economic pressures drove them to discriminate. The black population was neither large enough nor concentrated enough to constitute a political threat. And since Oklahoma's agriculture and oil-based economy was booming, economic competition between white and black labour was unlikely to become a problem. Oklahoma had opportunities enough for everyone. The inevitable conclusion is that racism was the sole motive for the segregation and disfranchisement of Oklahoma blacks.

In times of trouble, emigration inevitably became a popular topic of discussion among American blacks. In 1910 the disillusioned and embittered black Oklahomans were prime candidates for emigration. Most of them were newcomers to the state, unencumbered by ties of sentiment. Moreover, nationalist feeling was strong among Oklahoma blacks, as evidenced by the establishment of separate communities and the unsuccessful attempt to form a black state. Although they had failed in Oklahoma, the dream of a black homeland lived on. As might be expected, Oklahoma became a promising field of activity for African emigration promoters. At least one emigration scheme even enjoyed a degree of success. In 1913, sixty Oklahomans set sail for Africa, accompanied by Chief Alfred C. Sam of the Gold Coast Colony. Hundreds of other would-be emigrants were left behind.[39]

But distant and exotic Africa held little appeal for most Oklahoma blacks. Although anxious to leave the United States, they yearned for a closer, more familiar destination. Canada was the obvious choice. As mentioned earlier, there had already been several unsuccessful attempts to promote migration to Canada. Black publications, such as the Buffalo based Gazetteer and Guide had long extolled the merits of Canada,

> No better opportunity affords itself to the agricultural Negro than in western Canada. And more especially those who live in the Southland and have a little capital. The one salvation of the Negro is to migrate to a section where he can be a component part of building up an undeveloped country under favorable conditions... With a good strong arm a man can go to this section of Canada and in two years he can make enough money to send for his family...[40]

Even the Governor of Illinois, addressing a black audience in Chicago in 1909, had advised young blacks to seriously consider homesteading in western Canada.[41] Moreover, the mythology which presented Canada as the fugitive's haven was still very strong. The blacks held desperately to a naive belief that they would be heartily welcomed by the northern Dominion. Ironically, this belief was heightened by the activities of the Canadian Immigration Branch in Oklahoma.

Most American blacks, centred in the south or in urban areas, were geographically removed from the activities of the Immigration Branch. Even Oklahoma was not considered a fruitful field for immigration work. The nearest Canadian Government Agent was stationed in Kansas City. But nonetheless, Oklahoma was included in the extensive immigration promotion campaign of newspaper advertisements and pamphlet distribution. Naturally, although no mention was made of race, the Immigration Branch wished to attract only white Oklahomans. But blacks could not be prevented from reading the advertisements and assuming that the invitation was extended to them as well. In 1909, a series of advertisements was placed in the Wellston News. In an interesting juxtaposition, two contrasting articles appeared side by side in the May 7 edition. The first, headlined 'Lynchers not Indicted' concerned the grand jury's failure to indict those responsible for the lynching of four blacks at Ada, Oklahoma. The second article, entitled 'Dollar Wheat has Come to Stay', extolled the wheat growing potential of the Canadian west and predicted that the price of wheat would never sink below $1.00 per bushel. The article ended by noting that millions of acres of free land were still available.[42] Whether or not they were influenced by these articles, it is interesting that Wellston was close to the black community of Chandler, the home of several of the first blacks to settle in Amber Valley. One of these was Jefferson Davis Edwards, the future patriarch of the community.

The black Oklahomans who were to emigrate to Alberta and establish the Amber Valley settlement were a diverse group. Although few sources of information concerning them are available, interviews with their descendants and study of the Homestead Records make it possible to determine at least some of their characteristics. Most of them lived in the central and eastern parts of Oklahoma, the former Indian territory. However, they could not have been the original Creek blacks written about by the historian Harold Troper, those former slaves of the Indians who shared in the distribution of tribal lands.[43] Because the Indians and their former slaves had been settled in Oklahoma since 1825, it is logical to assume that almost all of the blacks who claimed tribal membership had been born in Oklahoma. In contrast, the vast majority of the Alberta-bound blacks were relatively recent arrivals in the state. Of the ninety-five original Amber Valley homesteaders studied, seventy-two had been born elsewhere in the south, most in Texas, Alabama, Tennessee and Arkansas. Consequently, they could not have belonged to Oklahoma's indigenous black population. Instead, they had likely moved into Oklahoma during the massive migrations of southern blacks sponsored by Edward McCabe and others.

This view is strengthened by statements from the descendants of the Amber Valley settlers that their families arrived in Oklahoma between 1903 and 1909.

Moreover, it is unlikely that even the twenty-two Amber Valley homesteaders who had been born in Oklahoma were part of the Creek slave population. Thirteen of them were under the age of twenty-five when they filed on their Alberta homesteads in 1910 or 1911. Therefore, they had been born when the migrations into Oklahoma were beginning and could quite easily have been the Oklahoma-born children of migrating families.

Nevertheless, it is possible that some of the future immigrants were connected with the Five Civilized Tribes. Some of the Amber Valley settlers were of partly Indian descent, most commonly Cherokee. They may have originally belonged with those remnants of the tribes who lived outside Oklahoma. They had likely journeyed to Oklahoma at the time of the allotment of the tribal lands, hoping to establish a claim.[44]

The vast majority of the Alberta-bound blacks were independent farmers. Because there were no racial impediments to homesteading in Oklahoma, most blacks owned their farms. By 1910, these farms were very valuable. Sold to railroads or white settlers, they would bring their owners $40 or $50 per acre.[45] Some Oklahoma blacks had also branched into more capitalistic undertakings. One family, although only recently arrived from Tennessee, owned a cotton mill and a small hotel.[46] The general prosperity of the Oklahoma blacks would be readily apparent in the quantities of household goods, agricultural equipment and cash which they brought with them to Alberta.

Once interest in Canada had been awakened, the intending immigrants largely duplicated the methods of planning and organization utilized during the black migrations to Kansas and Oklahoma. Meetings were held to debate the merits of the move. Letters were written to Canadian immigration authorities requesting information about homestead regulations, possible places for settlement and racial relations in Canada. One such letter, written by Rev. Will Hunt of Weweka, Okla., outlined poignantly the reasons for black interest in Canada,

> You ask me what is my intention of going to Canada? Well, I will tell you the truth. The First. I am deprived of life (and) liberty... Second. Our women is not treated well at all. Third. We have no schools that is any count. Forth. I am tyird raising cotton and the other man get it all and I get nothing. Fifth. I want to change government. I am tyird of this one. Six. I like your law better. They are good. Seven. (illegible) Eight. I want to live in peace if I can for god sake.[47]

Many of the details concerning the organization of the movement are unknown. Why, for example, was Alberta chosen as a destination? Likely, the Immigration Branch's publicity had specifically mentioned the province by name. Or possibly the first few black immigrants from Oklahoma arrived in Alberta by accident and the rest followed. There appear to have been no true leaders. The Alberta movement lacked an Edward McCabe figure in the background, directing operations and drumming up enthusiasm. Doubtless, clergymen such as Rev. Hunt were influential in promoting Canadian immigration within their own communities. A black Baptist minister in Edmonton, Rev. C. Taylor, was apparently also influential in encouraging Oklahoma blacks to move north. J.Bruce Walker, Commissioner of Immigration at Winnipeg, referred to his work in a report to the Superintendent of Immigration in October, 1910,

> I questioned the reverend gentleman as to the work he was doing in immigration by writing to his people in the South, and he said "I expect some 40 families to arrive here on the last of December 1910" and produced some letters to prove his statement. He says I am constantly receiving letters from coloured people in the south & he looked to me as a sort of adviser, to his people in the south and one who was doing considerable immigration work.[48]

That Taylor was well informed of the details of the immigration movement is proven by the fact that a party of Oklahoma blacks did indeed arrive in Edmonton on December 29, 1910.[49] Nevertheless, much of the movement appears to have been spontaneous, small groups of people arriving independently at the same decision. Somehow though, a degree of cohesion was preserved.

The sequence of events which preceded the first large migration of Oklahoma blacks into the Amber Valley area is fairly well documented. Sometime during January or February of 1910, the first party left Oklahoma. They were a small all-male group, led by two middle-aged men, Jordan Murphy of Chandler and Nim Toles of Clearview. Their initial destination was Kansas City, where they made arrangements for their immigration through J.S. Crawford, the Canadian Government Agent. From Kansas City they travelled by train, crossing the border at Emerson, Manitoba, and proceeding directly to Edmonton.[50] It seems likely that this group was sent to reconnoiter. They must have been pleased with what they saw for they filed on thirteen homesteads in the Amber Valley area that spring and sent enthusiastic reports home to Oklahoma, urging their friends and relatives to join them. As a result, another small group of blacks set out from the vicinity of Chandler and Clearview in July, 1910. Nine Amber Valley homesteads were filed on by members of this group, including one by the young Jefferson Davis Edwards who had abandoned his original plans of becoming a Baptist missionary in Africa. One member of the group, Henry "Parson" Sneed, returned to Oklahoma after only a few days in Alberta.[51] Once home, Sneed set about organizing and publicizing a large-scale migration of blacks to Alberta. A black newspaper in Enid, Oklahoma reported.

> Within the next few months it is estimated that at least one thousand Negroes will leave from the northern and central part of this state for Alberta where they will form colonies in the vicinity of Edmonton.[52]

The response was enthusiastic. Large family groups volunteered from all over Oklahoma, with a particularly large contingent coming from the black town of Clearview. Sneed screened his volunteers carefully, selecting only prosperous, well-to-do farmers who would easily satisfy Canadian immigration requirements.[53]

Transporting the settlers and their possessions to

Canada proved surprisingly easy. Local land companies and railroads, particularly the Southern Pacific Railway and the Burlington Railway, were happy to see the blacks leave Oklahoma.[54] They hoped to attract supposedly more desirable white settlers in their place. The railways made special arrangements for the group to charter a train of coaches and freight cars to carry them to the Canadian border. And so, one day in March 1911, Sneed's party of 174 men, women and children left Oklahoma. They were an optimistic group, expecting a warm welcome and excellent opportunities in a land desperate for hard-working homesteaders. Instead, they were destined to become embroiled in a major immigration controversy.

Footnotes

[1] C.Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p.26.

[2] Ibid., p. 84.

[3] Florette Henri, Black Migration (New York: Anchor Press, 1975), p.21.

[4] Ibid., p.2.

[5] Ibid., p. 350.

[6] Harold Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply (Toronto: Griffin House, 1972), p. 123.

[7] Woodward, Strange Career of Jim Crow, pp. 97-100. The exact meaning of the term "Jim Crow" is obscure. It originated with the black actors who travelled throughout the United States with their masters before the Civil War. Eventually, it became a broad term referring to anything which dealt specifically with blacks.

[8] Edmonton Journal, 21 February 1912.

[9] Henri, Black Migration, p. 39.

[10] Ibid., p. 18.

[11] Edwin S. Redkay, Black Exodus (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 171.

[12] Ibid., p. 231.

[13] Ibid., p. 15.

[14] Ibid., p. 193.

[15] Barney McKay to Clifford Sifton, 27 October 1901, Immigration Branch Records, R.G. 76, Vol.192, File 72552, pt. 1, Public Archives of Canada. (hereafter referred to as I.B.R.).

[16] James Stachan to Clifford Sifton, 21 January 1902, I.B.R., pt. 1.

[17] Stephen W. Hill to Clifford Sifton, 6 October 1903, I.B.R., pt. 1.

[18] Henri, Black Migration, p. 51.

[19] Ibid., p. 350.

[20] Nell Irvin Painter, The Exodusters (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 146.

[21] Ibid., p. 149.

[22] Ibid., p. 159.

[23] Stewart Grow, "The Blacks of Amber Valley, Negro Pioneering in Northern Alberta," Canadian Ethnic Studies (1974), p. 18.

[24] Redkey, Black Exodus, p. 100.

[25] Mozell C. Hill, "The All-Negro Communities of Oklahoma: the Natural History of a Social Movement," Journal of Negro History (1946), p. 262.

[26] Kenneth Hamilton, "The Origins and Early Development of Langston, Oklahoma," Journal of Negro History (1977), pp. 275-276.

[27] Ibid., p. 273.

[28] Ibid., p. 272.

[29] Redkey, Black Exodus, p. 292; Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, "Black Settlers in Alberta," CALUM (University of Calgary Alumni Association, September - October 1980). p. 9.

[30] Grant Foreman, A History of Oklahoma (Norman, Okla: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), p. 305.

[31] Interview with Professor Burton Smith, Department of History, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 8 May 1980.

[32] Hill, "All-Negro Communities of Oklahoma," p. 260.

[33] Redkey, Black Exodus, p. 102.

[34] Ibid., p. 250.

[35] Hill, "All-Negro Communities of Oklahoma," p. 260.

[36] Grow, "Blacks of Amber Valley," p. 19.

[37] Woodward, Strange Career of Jim Crow, p. 98.

[38] Foreman, History of Oklahoma, p. 320; Edwin C. Reynolds, Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State (Norman, Okla: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 329.

[39] Redkey, Black Exodus, p. 293.

[40] The Gazetteer and Guide, 24 April 1903, I.B.R., pt. 1.

[41] Chicago Tribune, 18 September 1909, I.B.R., pt. 1.

[42] Grow, "Blacks of Amber Valley," p. 21.

[43] Harold Troper, "The Creek Negroes of Oklahoma and Canadian Immigration, 1909-1911", Canadian Historical Review Vol. 53, no.3 (1972).

[44] Homestead Records, Provincial Archives of Alberta; Grow, "Blacks of Amber Valley", p. 22; Interview with Lester Mapp, Amber Valley, 14 May 1980; Interview with Edith Mayes, Edmonton, 15 April 1980; Interview with Katie Milton, Amber Valley, 13 May 1980.

[45] Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, p. 277.

[46] Interview with Susie Mapp, Edmonton, 28 April 1980.

[47] Rev. Will Hunt to Frank Oliver, 6 October 1910, I.B.R., pt. 2.

[48] J.Bruce Walker to W.D. Scott, 26 October 1910, I.B.R., pt. 2.

[49] Edmonton Bulletin, 30 December 1910.

[50] Grow, "Blacks of Amber Valley," p. 22.

[51] Ibid., p. 25; Homestead Records.

[52] Colin A. Thomson, Blacks in Deep Snow (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1979), p. 77.

[53] Manitoba Free Press, 5 March 1911, I.B.R., pt. 2.

[54] Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, p. 53.

CHAPTER 4: The Immigration Branch and Black Immigration, 1899-1923

The arrival of Sneed's party at the Canadian border in March 1911, sparked an immigration crisis which had been brewing for well over a decade. As early as 1899, the Canadian Government Agent in Kansas City had been instructed to discourage black interest in Canada, "...it is not desired that any Negro immigrants should arrive in Western Canada, under the auspices of our Department, or that such immigration should be promoted by our agents."[1] A terser directive, "We do not want these people", was cabled to the Agent in Chicago.[2] Yet, as the Immigration Branch was well aware, these forceful commands were sheer bluster. Despite the general Canadian dislike of blacks, no legislative statute or department regulation restricted their immigration. In fact, Immigration Branch records did not even classify American immigrants on the basis of race. Under these circumstances, the Immigration Branch's anti-black policy was informal and unwritten.

For myriad reasons, the government did not care to systematically define or make public its views on black immigration. For a government which quite openly discriminated against other non-white immigrants, this was a curious phenomenon. But the case of the black immigrants was fraught with domestic and international complications. The government was reluctant to offend Canadian blacks, especially those residing in narrowly held Ontario and Nova Scotia constituencies. Equally pressing was the need to maintain good political and economic relations with the governments of the West Indies and the United States. Ottawa could ill afford to anger either of these nations by publicly discriminating against their citizens.

Consequently, during the years 1900-1910, the Immigration Branch's dealings with prospective black immigrants were circumspect and tactful. Whenever possible, blacks were excluded from the intensive publicity campaign conducted by the Immigration Branch throughout the United States. No advertising appeared in the black press and no special publications were issued to attract the interest of blacks as was the case with other American ethnic and religious groups.[3] Individuals who sought information regarding the immigration of blacks were politely but firmly discouraged. The urgings of a white Texas clergyman that Canada accept black settlers elicited a typical response,

> In the matter of a settlement of Americans of African descent in the Canadian North-West, I would say that I have observed after some years experience in Canada, that these people do not take readily to our climate on account of the rather severe winters.[4]

Ironically, while advising blacks that Canada's climate was too harsh, the Immigration Branch was simultaneously making enormous efforts to convince white Americans that the opposite was true.[5] And as the Immigration Branch was well aware, Canada's own sizable black community had survived countless Ontario and Maritime winters, with no discernible ill effects. But nevertheless, the Canadian climate became a principal weapon in the Immigration Branch's campaign to discourage black immigration. Letters sent to black prospective immigrants almost invariably made mention of blizzards and sub-Arctic conditions.

However, the Immigration Branch was not completely systematic in its discouragement of blacks. In the absence of a clearly defined policy, much was left to the discretion of individual officials. In some instances, Canadian Government Agents and Department bureaucrats were quite helpful, providing black immigration organizers with promotional literature and instructions about how to obtain Canadian Land Seekers' Certificates entitling them to reduced train rates. Occasionally, even very senior staffers seemed to forget that they were supposed to discourage black inquirers. Thus, in 1905, W.D. Scott, the Superintendent of Immigration, replied warmly to a black Oklahoman's proposal for settling seventy-five families in Canada,

> I am sending you some printed matter showing the terms on which the free grant lands are open for entry in western Canada...Any persons that are willing to come and take our lands on the terms mentioned in these publications will be welcomed, but I would not like to encourage anyone to come in the hope of getting work in a trade other than farming.[6]

That the prospective immigrants were black did not seem to bother the Superintendent of Immigration at all. His only concern was that they might be tradesmen, not farmers.

As late as 1909, Scott wrote a note to a black in Ohio which, while not exactly warm, was not discouraging either:

> The coloured line as you call it, is not drawn in Canada in the eyes of the law and all men have exactly the same rights in this country, irrespective of race, colour or religion and if you decide to go and settle in Western Canada, there is nothing to stop you doing so, so far as the law and government regulations are concerned.[7]

This on-again, off-again opposition to black immigration was adequate during the first few years of the new century when there was little fear of a massive immigration of blacks. But as the decade wore on, it became clear that the government would have to take more definite action. Because of the deteriorating social and political condition of southern blacks, the prospect of immigration to Canada was becoming increasingly attractive. The stack of inquiries in the Immigration Branch's black immigration file, known informally as the "Coon file", grew steadily. Dozens of letters were received from black and white Canadians and Americans, all interested in promoting the immigration of American blacks. Interestingly, until 1910, letters from Oklahomans did not predominate. Correspondence was received in roughly equal proportions from a large number of states. Most inquiries were from persons or organizations who wished to arrange for the settlement of large groups of blacks. One of the most ambitious was A.A. Crimm of Illinois who requested that 500,000 acres be set aside for a colony of black farmers.[8] Other unrealistic proposals included the previously mentioned plans of Barney McKay of the Afro-

American Literary Bureau and an Atlanta watchmaker to import respectively 5,000 "thrifty, hardy agriculturalists" and 1,000 of Georgia's "most industrious negroes".[9] A black Pennsylvanian wished to move one hundred families from the north-western states to the Canadian west.[10] And George Simmons of Alabama wrote of fifty families who were willing to immigrate if the Canadian government would provide transportation.[11] Some of the schemes involved Canadian-owned land companies. For example, in 1908, the Calgary-based German-American Colonization Company joined with G.W. Mitchell, a black Minnesotan, in requesting that four to six townships be reserved for a black colony in Alberta. Like all the other proposals,it was politely declined by immigration authorities.[12]

Despite these many indications of black interest in Canada, the Immigration Branch showed little serious concern until 1908. During that year, the government was served a clear warning that black immigration was totally unacceptable to western Canadians. The decisive incident began innocently enough. Every summer, the CPR transported trainloads of harvest workers to the prairie provinces. Among these men in August, 1908, were forty blacks, brought by the CPR from Barbados. All had return tickets and no intention of remaining permanently in Canada. Nevertheless, their reception in the west was hostile. Sixteen of the Barbadians were stranded at the railway station in Virden, Manitoba, when local farmers refused to hire them. The six who were sent to Estevan, Saskatchewan, were arrested by a vigilant R.N.W.M.P. constable on the morning of their arrival, charged with vagrancy, and fined $1.50 each.[13] Some residents of the towns involved were sympathetic towards the harrassed West Indians. In a letter to the Immigration Branch, D.R. Davies of Estevan wrote,

> I characterise the arrest yesterday a hold-up and a dirty business on British subjects who were honestly looking for work and molesting no one. They certainly weren't vagrants.[14]

But other locals reacted with self-righteous anger. The Mayor of Virden expressed the feelings of those who felt themselves ill-used by both the government and the CPR:

> They were sent to our town, arriving here Monday morning 17 inst, by the CPR at Winnipeg, 15 or 16 Negroes or West Indians. They certainly were not asked for nor wanted, but simply dumped upon us. We have telegraphed the CPR but they ignore us. These men cannot secure work as farmers' wives are afraid of them and they are destitute, the town now providing for them.[15]

This episode erased whatever doubts the Immigration Branch may have had regarding the undesirability of black immigrants. The Superintendent of Immigration began to cast about for effective ways of preventing black West Indians from entering the country. But the problem was a delicate one. As the Immigration Officer at Halifax pointed out, the healthy, well-educated Barbadians had fulfilled all Canadian immigration requirements.[16] Moreover, the necessity of maintaining good trade relations with the West Indies had to be considered. So in the end, no action was taken. The Superintendent of Immigration contented himself with rapping the knuckles of an uncharacteristically repentant CPR.[17]

Within a few months, the West Indian dilemma would be almost forgotten, eclipsed by the prospect of an imminent invasion of Oklahoma blacks. As early as 1908, the Canadian Government Agent in Kansas City had reported an unprecedented interest in Canadian immigration on the part of "intelligent and well-to-do" black Oklahomans.[18] During the next two years, almost all the letters of inquiry received by the Immigration Branch from black Americans would originate in Oklahoma. Increasingly distraught reports from the beleaguered Kansas City agent, James S. Crawford, told of more and more blacks leaving for Canada. In March 1910, for example, Crawford reported that a Saskatchewan-bound group of blacks had arrived in Kansas City with eight freight cars of belongings.[19]

The first recorded group of black immigrants from Oklahoma stepped off the train at Edmonton in April, 1908. The party consisted of seven families who intended to settle at Junkins, along the railway line some one hundred miles west of Edmonton.[20] In October of the following year, Saskatchewan received its first black settlers.[21] But it wasn't until 1910 that the movement began in earnest. In January, the Edmonton Capital reported the arrival of twenty-nine black farmers from Clearview, Oklahoma, accompanied by a newspaper editor whose slogan was "Alberta, the home for the coloured race." After accompanying his charges to Junkins, the editor vowed to "set the tide of coloured emigration in the direction of Edmonton."[22]

Western Canada's prior experience with blacks was very limited. A few had been employed by the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1874, a black whiskey trader earned the dubious distinction of being both the first person arrested by the newly established North-West Mounted Police and the first to escape their custody.[23] A man of mixed black-Indian parentage worked as an interpreter at a southern Alberta whiskey fort during the 1870s and later became interpreter for the first Indian agent in Blackfoot territory. In 1880, a giant ex-slave, known as "Nigger Dan" Williams was hanged for murder at Fort Saskatchewan. And another former slave, John Ware, became one of Alberta's foremost ranchers and cowboys during the 1880s and 1890s.[24]

Although many western Canadians may have had little first-hand experience with blacks, they were all too familiar with the popular racial stereotypes. Consequently, they were not enthralled with the prospect of having black neighbors. In what would become a predictable pattern, the local business community was the first to protest. In April 1910, the Edmonton Board of Trade sent the following resolution to the Minister of the Interior,

> That the Edmonton Board of Trade call the attention of the Dominion Government to the recent marked increase in negro immigration into western Canada which in the Edmonton district has already worked serious detriment to certain localities by preventing the settlement of white people in localities in which Negroes have settled and which has the appearance of being the foundation of a 'Negro problem for western Canada'.

> And that in the opinion of this Board the negroes are a most undesirable element; and it is most respectfully urged that such immediate steps be taken by the Dominion Government as will result in this influx being stopped.[25]

The resolution was supported by a letter from the Secretary-Treasurer of the Bowden Board of Trade and by a report by Edmonton Police Chief, A.C. Lancey. While claiming that 20% of Edmonton's blacks were either prostitutes or pimps, Lancey's report stated of the black community, "They have taken up much more of our time and attention than any of the other foreign people residing in our city."[26]

In contrast with their western neighbors, residents of Saskatchewan calmly accepted the blacks who entered their province in 1910. Throughout the years of the black immigration controversy, public protest would be consistently stronger in Alberta. This was understandable since most of the black immigrants were headed for that province but it may also be significant that Alberta had a larger American-born population. In 1911, 21% of Alberta's population were American immigrants, compared with 14% in Saskatchewan.[27] Many of these people likely brought anti-black prejudices with them when they crossed the border. At least one contemporary observer thought so. In a letter published by the Edmonton Bulletin, Joseph A. Clark claimed, "This prejudice and violence towards Negro citizens comes almost exclusively from former residents of the southern states."[28] One of the people Clark was referring to was likely John Powell, the instigator of the 1910 Edmonton Board of Trade resolution. Powell was a Canadian who had lived in the American south for fourteen years. In March 1910, he expounded on his theory of racial relations in a letter to Frank Oliver,

> A small number of Negroes settled in any new township will be sufficient to blacken and make the neighborhood undesirable for white settlement... If all Negroes were good I would still consider it unwise for Canada to receive any of them, for the simple reason that they cannot be assimilated. Good white people will not mix or intermarry with blacks, and it would not be desirable for white Canadians of any class or description to do so.

Powell ended the letter with a stern admonishment, "People here are beginning to discuss the movement and if it goes on increasing it will only lead to trouble."[29]

The warning was not lost on Frank Oliver. The appearance of significant numbers of black immigrants and the first rumblings of negative public opinion in Alberta convinced the Minister that his personal intervention was needed. The sense of urgency was heightened by reports of the poverty and general unfitness of the black settlers moving into the Junkins area. On March 14, 1910, the Commissioner of Immigration at Winnipeg reported,

> They are extremely poor, some of them destitute, have no means to go farming, are huddling together in large numbers, they have generally very large families, have little or nothing to clothe or maintain themselves with...and are not a class of persons as we ought to encourage to enter the country.[30]

In a strange coincidence, Oliver signed an Order in Council the next day, which required immigrants to have in their possession a ticket to their destination in Canada and cash amounting to $25 during the months from March to October and $50 if they arrived between November and February.[31] Although not directed specifically at blacks, the Immigration Branch was confident that this money qualification would discourage the immigration of the poorest black Americans.

Almost immediately after the Order in Council was issued, the Superintendent of Immigration ordered Agent Crawford in Kansas City to use the new money requirement to stop the black immigration movement.[32] A week later, Crawford was directed to cease issuing Canadian Land Seekers' Certificates to prospective black immigrants.[33] Later in 1910, the government was able to secure the CPR's cooperation in denying reduced train rates to all black immigrants. This measure, combined with the new financial qualification, was expected to deter all but the wealthiest and most determined of the black immigrants.

Hampered by the total absence of reliable information concerning the movement, Oliver decided that the Inspector of U.S. Agencies should personally investigate the condition of Oklahoma's black population.[34] Consequently, W.J. White spent five days touring the heavily black Oklahoma counties of Muskogee, Okmulgee and Coweta. His report, submitted to the Minister in September, was alarming. In black centres, White reported, "laziness is abundant and seems to have put its hallmark everywhere." Oklahoma blacks were indifferent farmers. Their farms were dirty and full of weeds and their crops were poor. Even though they had more money than the whites in the area, they lived in rundown shanties. White claimed that the entire region's prosperity was "kept back and held back by the preponderance of the coloured people who own most of the land." Moreover, to his horror, the Inspector had discovered that the "progressive element in Oklahoma" was urging the blacks to emigrate to Canada. White farmers in the locality hoped to acquire black land, preferably at bargain rates. The southern railroads were anxious to gain the revenue which would arise from transporting the blacks and their possessions northward. They also hoped to replace the blacks with supposedly more productive white farmers and thus guarantee themselves increased future revenues. Black clergymen completed the unlikely triumvirate. Disapproving of the increasing urbanization of Oklahoma's black population, they hoped to re-establish their charges on farms in the Canadian west.[35] White was convinced that ending the Canadian emigration movement would be in the best interest of both Canada and the blacks themselves:

> If undesirable to Oklahoma why not undesirable to Canada? More so. In Oklahoma he has lived the life that suits him best. All the ties that have been since his birth are there, the climate is one to which he is best fitted. He has social relations, and he has the surroundings that he has partly created. In Canada he has a different climate, he is removed from all the things which to his not overactive mind are part of his being, and he will never be able to fit himself to the changed conditions. He will not have the happiness and contentment he has enjoyed all his life. He will be called into greater activity than his system can meet.[36]

White's report did little to allay the growing concern of the Minister of the Interior and his officials. C.W. Speers, a Canadian Government Agent, was immediately sent on an inspection tour of the new settlements being established by black Oklahomans in Alberta and Saskatchewan. In his report, submitted late in October, 1910, Speers estimated that the two provinces had a combined black population of 634. For the most part, they were concentrated in a few areas. In Saskatchewan, a small party of four black farmers had settled in the Lashburn district. A larger group of seventy-six were homesteading in nearby Maidstone, and another hundred in the Wilkie colony south-east of Battleford. Alberta had a much larger black community. There were reportedly 175 blacks in Junkins, 150 in Edmonton, sixty-five in Amber Valley, thirty in the settlement of Campsie near Barrhead, and ten at Breton, south-west of Edmonton.[37] Almost all the blacks residing in Alberta and Saskatchewan had arrived from Oklahoma during the preceding twelve months.

Undoubtedly to everyone's surprise, the black homesteaders made a favorable impression on Agent Speers. His findings contradicted both Walker's report on the Junkins settlers and White's portrayal of the blacks in Oklahoma. Generally, Speers found the black settlers "industrious and doing as well as could be expected in a wooded country during their initial year." Unhappily though, their efforts were unappreciated by their neighbors, particularly Americans. White settlers complained that the value of their land had depreciated because of their proximity to blacks and white labourers frequently refused to work with them.

In both provinces, the prejudice against blacks was "most general most unanious (sic) and is assuming an acute stage." Speers feared that the presence of blacks would deter highly desirable American settlers from coming to the west, "it would be unwise to retard the prospective advent of 200,000 good white people on account of the admission of a limited number of coloured people." The only solution, Speers concluded, was to exclude black Americans,

> I am obliged to appreciate and recognise public opinion and make the recommendation that this work of bringing in numbers of coloured people be intercepted by such prohibitory means as the wisdom of the Department may deem expedient.[38]

Thus, within two months, two official Immigration Branch reports recommended the exclusion of black immigrants from Canada. The next move was up to the Minister of the Interior.

While all this was going on, Crawford, the ill-starred Kansas City Agent, was labouring under a dense cloud of ministerial disapproval. Despite direct orders to the contrary, he had apparently been issuing blacks with Canadian Land Seekers' Certificates. Complaints about the errant agent had reached Oliver's desk,

> Over a year ago White advised Mr. Crawford, of Kansas City that it was not in the interest of the work that he should issue certificates to coloured people from the South. They were a different class altogether from those who have been resident in Canada for a long time and they are not farmers in the way that we apply the term. The farming that they did was indifferent and careless and they were not desirable for Canada. I supposed that he had been living up to my verbal instructions. Notwithstanding this he has issued certificates right along and only as recently as a month ago.[39]

Deluged with a series of suggestions, instructions and thinly veiled threats, Crawford gamely defended himself by declaring, "I have stood in the way or there would have been not only a few hundred but many thousands of them."[40] His major problem, was the impossibility of determining if the hundreds of written inquiries which reached the Kansas City agency were from blacks or whites. Completely exasperated by September, he dumped the problem in the Superintendent's lap, sending him dozens of unanswered letters from Oklahoma. Scott devised an imaginative tactic. Telegrams were sent to the postmasters in the towns where the correspondence originated asking if the writers were black or white. The postmasters did not mince words. "Black as hell.", one replied. "Nigger!", scrawled another.[41]

But creative as this innovation was, it would not prevent black Oklahomans from crossing the border into Canada. By the early autumn of 1910, the Immigration Branch was in a quandary. Every subtle and not so subtle ploy it could reasonably use to dissuade blacks from immigrating had been tried and had only partially succeeded. Stronger measures were clearly needed if the black Oklahomans were to be barred from Canada.

Yet, not only did the need for discretion still exist during the autumn of 1910, it was more urgent than ever. Within a year, the government would be fighting for its life in a general election. Every vote would be crucial and the government could ill afford to lose the support of black or liberal-minded Canadians. Moreover, the all-important reciprocity negotiations with the United States had reached a critical stage. An ill-timed controversy could destroy Canada's reciprocity hopes forever. West Indian trade was also becoming increasingly important. Canadian businessmen were calling loudly for federation with one or more of the British West Indian colonies. And a Royal Commission in 1910 had recommended the strengthening of trade relations with the islands.[42] Clearly, if word leaked out, either at home or abroad, that Canada was actively discriminating against black immigrants, the results could be disastrous for Laurier's Liberal government. Under those circumstances, restrictive legislation was out of the question. But the creative minds in the Immigration Branch devised a simple but brilliant alternative. Existing immigration regulations would be strictly and selectively enforced, becoming an insurmountable barrier for blacks wishing to enter Canada. Thus the government could discriminate against blacks without seeming to do so. And it could continue to boast about the impartiality of its immigration policies.

Exactly when or how the program was introduced will likely never be known. As late as 1934, a longtime Immigration Branch official was still unwilling to divulge the specific details, even in a letter to an Alberta M.P., "The means used is one of the chapters in Immigration that has never been written and while familiar with it I do not care to put it on record now."[43] Undoubtedly though, the key element was the medical and character inspection of immigrants which had been established at American border crossing points in 1908. The inspection had been originally instituted to prevent undesirable European immigrants from slipping into Canada from the United States. Now it would be adapted to enforce a whites-only admissions policy. Immigration Agents at key points of entry received new instructions outlining the plan,

> There is not...any provision for excluding a man on the ground of his colour, but at the same time there are certain nationalities who are required to pass more stringent regulations than other nationalities.[44]

The vast majority of white immigrants would continue to cross the border unimpeded. But every black would now be subjected to a thorough and humiliating medical examination, designed to eliminate all but the very fittest.

Medically prohibited classes of immigrants under the Immigration Act of 1910 were very broad and loosely defined. As a result, a medical cause could be found to bar the entry into Canada of virtually any immigrant. Department records indicate that some immigrants were rejected because of such medical conditions as bronchitis, eczema, fractures, harelip, high temperature, pregnancy, psoriasis, ulcers, and varicose veins.[45] The Immigration Branch's policy of paying Medical Inspectors on the basis of the number of black immigrants they rejected, undoubtedly contributed to their zeal.[46] Under these circumstances, even the most robustly healthy black American could not be certain of passing the medical examination at the border.

Strangely, the Immigration Branch does not appear to have kept a record of the number of blacks who either successfully entered Canada or were rejected. However, records do indicate that the total number of immigrants rejected at American border crossing points rose precipitiously. In 1908-09, 4,589 immigrants were turned away by immigration officials. The number leaped to 15,404 in 1910-11 and peaked at 22,033 in 1911-12.[47] In light of the efforts made to exclude them, it seems likely that a large proportion of these rejected immigrants were black.

An indication of the success of the informal exclusion campaign was the angry reaction of Frank Oliver to the arrival in Edmonton of thirty-four black Oklahomans in December 1910. The group had taken the precaution of crossing the border at White Rock, B.C., where Immigration Officers were rumored to be more lenient than at the usual port of entry at Emerson, Manitoba. Oliver demanded to know if a medical examination had been made and if the party had benefitted from the reduced train rate.[48] The Immigration Agent at Edmonton was instructed to have the blacks deported if possible,

> If you can discover any reason why any of the thirty-four from Oklahoma should be deported take action. If you are suspicious that there are any who would not come up to the physical qualification call in City Health Officer to examine.[49]

Sometime during February of 1911, the routine rejection of a large group of blacks on financial grounds prompted fears of an international incident. The episode was widely represented in the American press as an indication that Canada had adopted a harsh new policy toward black immigration. Under the headline "Bar Negroes from Canada", the Boston Post reported,

> The Dominion Government today decided to stop the immigration of Negroes from the United States...The exclusion of Negro immigrants at Winnipeg is in line with the general policy of the Dominion to encourage white immigration and to keep out the yellow and black races. The law has not been changed to exclude Negroes but the officials are more strict in interpreting the provisions of the act which forbids the admission of persons not likely to make desirable citizens.[50]

These reports caught the attention of the American State Department. The Edmonton Journal announced that the Secretary of State, Philander C. Knox, had asked the U.S. Consul, John E. Foster, at Ottawa to ascertain if "under the Canadian law, any American citizens as a class could be excluded on account of their colour."[51] Satisfied that there were no immigration regulations specifically discriminating against blacks, Knox advised his officials in Canada that the United States could not intervene. They were instructed not even to warn prospective black immigrants of the likelihood of rejection until Canada seemed about to take decisive action.[52] The worst fears of the Immigration Branch were now allayed. The State Department had decided not to make an issue of the matter.

The leaders of the American black community were also alarmed by the newspaper accounts of discrimination. W.E.B. Dubois, President of the National Association for the Advance-ment of Coloured People and editor of the widely read publication, Crisis, wrote a letter of protest to the Immigration Branch. In response, a department official denied that any attempt had been made to bar black immigrants. However, he pointed out, it was considered significant that few blacks from eastern Canada had settled on prairie homesteads,

> ...a fact which leads the government to believe that Western Canada will not be found very suitable as a field of settlement to coloured people from the United States when similar people from Canada do not go west to take up land.

Realizing that this red herring was unlikely to put off Dubois, the official frankly warned him that black immigrants would be rejected at the border,

> There is nothing in Canadian Immigration Law which disbars any person on the ground of colour, but since coloured people are not considered as a class likely to do well in this country all other regulations respecting health, money etc., are strictly enforced and it is quite possible that a number of your fellow countrymen may be rejected on such grounds.[53]

Crisis published this letter and a number of other articles relating to Canada's exclusionary policy. In doing so, it unwittingly aided the Immigration Branch by making American blacks aware of the policy.[54]

But as the Immigration Branch was learning, black Oklahomans were at least as determined to get to Canada as the government was to stop them. By the spring of 1911, it was evident that although rigorous enforcement of immigration regulations eliminated a large proportion of black immigrants, it could not keep them all out. To the government's consternation, the blacks had found ways of circumventing the regulations. Many seemed intent on taking advantage of s.19 of the Immigration Act which permitted rejected immigrants to appeal to the Minister.[55] W.H. Rogers, Crawford's replacement as Canadian Government Agent in Kansas City, reported that some black immigrants were bringing doctors and lawyers with them, "the former to certify to their physical fitness, and the latter to argue the legal side of the matter."[56] A party of forty blacks, rejected at the border because two of them had tuberculosis, hired a black lawyer, James Watson of Vancouver, to appeal their case to the Minister.[57] A black woman with several children, unlawfully rejected by immigration authorities while attempting to join her husband in Canada, enlisted the aid of an Assistant State Attorney in Minot, North Dakota.[58] Moreover, black immigration organizers, aware of the stringent medical and financial requirements, were carefully screening their charges. On March 21, Sneed's party of 174 black Oklahomans passed the border inspection with flying colours and entered Canada. Sneed himself attested to the excellent health of his group, "There ain't nothin' the matter with us, mister. Sick! Ah'd like youn to show me whar we have any sick people."[59] Their wealth was equally undeniable. Sneed's immigrants brought with them nine freight cars of goods including twenty-nine teams of horses and as much as $2,500 each in cash.[60] To their consternation, Immigration Officials could not reject a single one.

Sneed's group does not appear to have been unique. Many of the black immigrants brought with them a great deal of wealth, at least as much as the average white American and many times more than most European immigrants. For example, one lady appeared at Edmonton's Immigration Hall with $1,000 sewn into the hem of her petticoat.[61] In December 1910, Agent Crawford in Kansas City reported that a large group of prospective black immigrants possessed an average wealth of $1,762.[62] And in April 1911, the Calgary Herald estimated that each family of another party of blacks had brought with them between $1,000 and $4,000.[63] There was certainly no danger that these people would become an economic burden on the community. Indeed, were it not for their color, they would have been considered a superior class of immigrants.

The success of Sneed's group came as a rude shock to the Immigration Branch and the west. On March 21, the Edmonton Bulletin had confidently assured its readers that Immigration officials intended to block the group at the border.[64] Their failure to do so prompted fears that many more blacks would attempt to follow. The Assistant Superintendent of Immigration informed Oliver that 1,000 more blacks were expected to arrive during the course of the year.[65] This view was supported by an article in an Oklahoma newspaper,

> Many other Negroes are making preparations to start and indications are that there will be a general exodus. It develops that the Canadian colonization work among the Negroes has been in progress for several months,

> the intention being to move 1,000 families, or about 7,000 negroes this spring, of which the Clearview negroes formed the advance guard.[66]

Canadian newspapers were filled with rumors of an impending black deluge. The Manitoba Free Press reported that Sneed's group would be joined in April by another party of 200 blacks.[67] The Edmonton Journal raised this total to 2,000, and reported that the blacks were destitute and being funded by a colonization company during their first year in Canada.[68] In a folksier vein, the Edmonton Bulletin reported the claims of an ambitious immigration promoter, Colonel Tom J. Harris of Sapulpa, Oklahoma,

> Ah'll pilot 5000 niggers into British-American soil before the summah goes, suh. Ah'll put a niggah and a team of hosses on every quarter section of land I can get my hands on in Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan.[69]

The prospect of a black deluge appeared particularly menacing in light of an incident which occurred in Edmonton on April 4 or 5, 1911. A fifteen year old girl, Hazel Huff, was found bound, gagged and apparently robbed on the floor of her home. Her assailant was reported to be a "black, burly Negro".[70] Steeped in the myth of black criminality, Albertans had long dreaded such an attack. This dread had been heightened by inflammatory statements made by Calgary's Chief of Police in March:

> I believe it would be a good thing if the commissioners of the city would take some action to exclude Negroes from the rights of citizenship and prevent them from coming into the city. Most of the Negroes in this city are of the class that breeds crime and although it is hard to convict them in court, for they will all swear in favor of the black prisoner, we will

> endeavor to chase them out of the city. Every Negro with few exceptions, is connected with crime of some description in the city; they are vagrants in a sense and do no work only that of an immoral character.[71]

Considering the prevalence of these attitudes, the over-reaction of the western press to the Hazel Huff incident is perhaps understandable. The Regina Leader Post described the incident as "the first of the negro atrocities".[72] A Calgary Albertan editorial, reprinted by the Journal, expounded upon the general undesirability of black immigrants,

> This sort of thing is bound to happen and will continue to occur as long as Negroes are in this country. This kind of crime will continue and increase, in proportion as the Negro population increases. The government should take the necessary steps to keep these people out. They are a menace to the welfare of the country. They are undesirable citizens of the worst kind. The best of them are not wanted for the reason that they cannot assimilate with the white population. We do not want a coloured Alberta.
>
> Not many of the coloured people are here yet, but a black cloud is looming up from the south which is dangerous enough. The first step of the Department of the Interior should be to shut out all the coloured people from homestead rights. Close out the yellow man, the red man and the black man. They are not good settlers. They cannot become good Canadians. They are undesirable, particularly upon homesteads.[73]

Similar sentiments were expressed by the Lethbridge Daily News, in an editorial entitled, "The Black Peril".[74]

To the embarrassment of the press, the Hazel Huff episode was soon discovered to be a hoax. The girl had tied herself up and invented the attack to keep her parents from learning that she had lost a ring and some money. Unluckily for Hazel, Edmonton's ever alert police noticed she had "made the error of tying an eye bandage over her forehead instead of her eyes".[75]

Unfortunately, the retraction of the story came too late. Public opinion was already inflamed. During the months of April and May, 1911, the Immigration Branch was deluged with angry letters and resolutions from Alberta and Saskatchewan. Once again, the first off the mark was the Edmonton Board of Trade. John Powell was a central figure at the Board's April 13 meeting, regaling the membership with lurid tales of the unassimilability and criminality of the black race. The Board of Trade passed a resolution, similar to its 1910 resolution, condemning black immigration. As well, it sponsored a petition to Prime Minister Laurier:

> It is a matter of common knowledge that it has been proved in the U.S. that Negroes and whites cannot live in proximity without the occurrence of revolting lawlessness, and the development of bitter race hatred, and that the most serious question facing the U.S. today is the Negro problem. We are anxious that such a problem should not be introduced into this fair land at present enjoying a reputation for freedom from such lawlessness as has developed in all sections in the U.S. where there is any considerable Negro element. There is no reason to believe that we have here a higher order of civilization, or that the introduction of a Negro problem here would have different results.[76]

Edmontonians responded enthusiastically to the petition. It was displayed at a number of prominent downtown locations, including Watson Realty, The Windsor Hotel, The King Edward Hotel, The Merchant's Bank, The Union Bank and The Board of Trade offices.[77] During the several days it was on display. the petition was signed by over 3,400 people, 14% of the city's population.[78]

The only recorded opposition came from several members of Edmonton's black community who harassed those circulating the petition. Secretary-Treasurer Fisher of the Board of Trade, was amazed by their reaction,

> They do not seem to appreciate the spirit in which we are approaching the question. We have nothing to say against the Negro or those that sympathize with him. We are merely trying to prevent that happening which has already happened in the states and if the Negroes in the country would only recognize that their position would be a thousand times more intolerable with a vastly increased Negro population, they would not be so eager to increase their numbers. Those Negroes who have been here some time have had a square deal and been treated as whites, but if you would get a few thousand more in, conditions would be much changed. They would then be treated as they are in south.[79]

Boards of Trade throughout the west were quick to support the Edmonton initiative. Resolutions opposing black immigration were sent to Ottawa from ten other Boards in Alberta and five in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.[80] Some outdid the Edmonton Board by calling for even harsher measures. The Strathcona and Morinville Boards of Trade demanded that blacks be segregated into certain areas of the province and that whites be removed from those areas.[81] The Red Deer, Saskatoon and Battleford Boards requested that blacks be prohibited from filing on homestead lands.[82]

The Athabasca Board of Trade sent two plaintive letters to Oliver, assuring him of their opposition to black immigration and warning him of dire consequences should more blacks settle in the area, "when it was learned around town that these negroes were coming out there was indignation and many threatened violence, threatened to meet them on the trail out of town and drive them back." The Board ended by tactfully suggesting that the blacks be segregated in certain areas, preferably near Junkins.[83]

The only dissenting voice came from the Regina Board of Trade, which "regarded the existence of the 'negro problem' as an imaginary evil and decided to take no action in the matter."[84] But Regina's defection went unnoticed in the resounding chorus of western protest. On April 28, the Edmonton City Council joined the outcry, calling on the federal government to stop the expected influx and demanding that those blacks already in the province be segregated from the rest of the population.[85] The Edmonton Trades and Labour Council and five United Farmers of Alberta locals also sent resolutions of protest.[86] At an emergency meeting, the I.O.D.E. sponsored a petition which outlined the special danger black immigration posed for white women,

> We do not wish that the fair fame of Western Canada should be sullied with the Lynch Law but we have no guarantee that our women will be safer in their scattered homesteads than white women in other countries with a Negro population.[87]

The W.C.T.U. followed suit with a petition signed by "sixty intelligent women members."[88] And finally, there was a petition from fifty dejected white residents of Junkins,

> We entered upon our homesteads in these districts. enduring cheerfully the discomforts and privations incidental to early settlement of a new country in advance of roads and railroads and other conveniences, in the belief that we would be able to make happy, contented and prosperous homes for ourselves and our families. After establishing ourselves, with high hopes of getting other white settlers to help us

> develop our country, the vacant lands have been largely settled upon by Negroes from the U.S. and our hopes of happiness and contentment are destroyed. Without wishing to disparage our coloured neighbors, we submit that the two races cannot live together in amity and concord. It is a matter of common knowledge that, wherever the two races have intermingled in the U.S., there have developed conditions which are a disgrace to civilization. We have no hopes that the conditions would be materially different here. We have the same Negroes and the whites are not materially different. There is no reason to suppose that we have here a noticeably higher order of civilization which will better stand the strain when put to the test.
>
> Our families no longer live here in contentment and security. We cannot sell our places on obtaining patents, with a view of moving elsewhere, for the reason that no one will buy in a negro settlement. We therefore, respectfully urge that the Government of Canada make arrangements either to remove the coloured homesteaders into some segregated area; or to move the white settlers into some other district which will not be open to negroes, giving us some adequate compensation for the money and labour we have expended upon our places.

Only a few brave souls dared to publicly defend the beleaguered black immigrants. In a sermon on May 8, Rev. J.E. Hughson of McDougall Methodist Church condemned the Board of Trade resolution and called for tolerance,

> These are the voices of commerce and industry... They say the Negro must go. But Christianity tells us that the Negro is our brother, made of the same essential humanity. He may be our weaker brother. He may need our stronger hand to guide him, but he is our brother and we must act the part of a big brother toward him...When our commercial and industrial systems are really Christian, our Negro Problem will settle itself, because there will be no problem.[90]

Members of Edmonton's black community were doubtless encouraged, if not particularly flattered, by the reverend gentleman's sentiments. Similar views were expressed in several letters published in the Edmonton newspapers. One writer advised white Albertans to associate with blacks and if possible, "educate the Negro to our own standard."[91]

Joseph A. Clarke of Edmonton reminded the Bulletin that other immigrant groups were more to be feared than blacks,

> There are other races and colours being welcomed by these same people into Canada, who are just as much, or more, criminals and immoral and a far worse menace to the labouring majority of Alberta or any other country or province they invade, and boards of trade and other capitalistic appendages have no objections to offer.[92]

And finally, a woman from Heilburg, Saskatchewan, reminded Albertans that the black settlers were not, after all, very numerous, "Surely you Canadians can tolerate a few hundred Negroes if the people of the South can live with thousands of them."[93]

That vast majority of Albertans who felt threatened by the immigration of blacks soon found a champion in the political arena. The province's Liberal government, led by Arthur Sifton, brother of the former Minister of the Interior, steered clear of the issue. But the opposition Conservatives seized upon it eagerly. In April, a Conservative meeting in Edmonton was treated to a rousing address by C.E. Simmonds of Leduc,

> Like the province of British Columbia being called 'Yellow British Columbia', our own province might be called 'Black Alberta'...We do not want to have this name attached to us, nor do we want to have the province black in spots. I can only see one way out of this difficulty and this is to put the present government out of power and bring in one who will listen to our pleas...[94]

Two weeks earlier, as Sneed's group neared the border, the issue had surfaced in Parliament. Surprisingly, it was not the Conservative opposition nor the Liberal M.P.'s from

Alberta and Saskatchewan who first demanded an explanation of the government's policy regarding black immigration. Instead it was A.H. Clarke, a Liberal from the heavily black Ontario constituency of South Essex who spoke first. While questioning Oliver, Clarke showered praise upon Canada's black community, "Coloured people in my experience has been amongst the most loyal citizens of this country. They have been true to the British flag and I think they are worthy to be reckoned amongst the people of Canada." Clarke's question had most likely been pre-arranged, an invitation to the Minister to make a speech explaining and justifying the government's stand on black immigration. Oliver's response assured black voters that Canada's immigration policy was absolutely impartial, "the exclusion officers take measures to prevent the entry of all persons who may be considered undesirable under our law, without any distinction of race, colour or previous condition of servitude." But to appease the west, Oliver also suggested that existing immigration regulations were infinitely flexible, and could easily keep out undesirable blacks,

> ...There are many cases where the admission or exclusion of an immigrant depends upon a strict or a lax interpretation of the law, so that if the immigrant is of what we might call the desirable class then they are administered laxly, and if he is of the presumably less desirable class then they are administered more restrictedly.[95]

In April 1911, the eastern Canadian press seized eagerly upon the black immigration issue, publishing a number of sensationalized accounts. For example, headlines in the

Montreal Herald read, "Negroes Ousting Whites in Alberta." The Ottawa Free Press reported, "Negro Settlers Troop into West, Edmonton People Complain to Minister of the Interior of the Influx."[96]

The response of newspapers in Alberta was generally much more subdued. At first, even after the arrival of Sneed's contingent of 174 blacks, they found little cause for alarm. In a March 24, 1911, editorial headed "Jack Frost as Immigration Officer", the Edmonton Journal confidently asserted that "the climate of our western country is too strenuous for those accustomed to that of the South."[97] Several days later, the Journal's editor extended a lukewarm welcome to the newly arrived blacks,

> Under the circumstances we can but wish him well in his new home and express the hope that he may so conduct himself that he will live down the unfriendly and distrustful spirit which exists towards him.[98]

And the Calgary Herald reassured its readers with the headline, "Negroes Not Menace to Morals."[99] Soon after, this attitude changed drastically as the press became caught up in the wave of panic which developed from the Hazel Huff affair. However, after the initial excitement died down and the incident was proved to be a hoax, the newspapers returned to their cautious and conciliatory stance. The amount of news and editorial space devoted to the black immigration issue was surprisingly small. Perhaps the newsmen were so preoccupied by the intricacies of the reciprocity debate, that they were unaware of the controversy which raged on their doorsteps. A more likely explanation is that they did not wish to aggravate an already dangerously inflamed public opinion. Even the Edmonton Journal, a Conservative newspaper, seemed intent on calming the situation. On May 13, 1911, the Journal recorded an American visitor's impressions of the blacks in the Junkins settlement. Under the headline, "This Virginian Says the Junkins Negro Makes a Good Farmer", the visitor mildly rebuked Albertans for their opposition to black settlement,

> You seem to have a wrong impression of these negroes, if I may say so. There are Negroes in the South who lay around in the sun and never do a hand's turn of work, but that isn't your Junkins Negro. You're going to see the day when you'll be proud of him. He is a worker, he's educated, he's intelligent. I tell you sir, he's a very advanced agriculturalist. Some of the Junkins Negroes have sent to Chicago to get their dairy stock. They have cows, pigs and chickens and crops and lots to eat. They are hospitable and intelligent. They are doing the best work we saw being done in all that country. I'm surprised and proud to have to say it, sir.[100]

This glowing report was pronounced "gratifying" by the Journal's editorialists.[101]

Although Alberta's newspapers urged acceptance of those blacks already in the province, they were opposed to any further black immigration. A Journal editorial suggested the implementation of Section 38(c) of the Immigration Act, "which provides that the Governor-General in Council may prohibit the landing of any class of immigrants deemed unsuitable to the climate or requirements of Canada."[102] In an editorial on May 30, the Bulletin undertook the task of explaining the west's opposition to black immigration,

> It would be wrong to assume that all or even the majority of those who look with disfavor on the pros-

> pect of a large influx of coloured people into the Canadian West are animated by any sentiment of hostility toward the Negro race, or that they are even lacking in a proper sympathy for the members of this unfortunate and outrageously used branch of the human family.

The objections of white Albertans, intoned the Bulletin, were motivated not by racial prejudice or the dread of economic competition, but by the fear that the immigration of large numbers of blacks would spark racial conflict such as that which plagued the United States.[103]

Immigration Branch officials were both dismayed and alarmed at the west's open display of anger during the spring of 1911. Obviously some action had to be taken, and quickly, before the situation got completely out of hand. Oliver decided to attack the problem at its source: Oklahoma. In May 1911, Speers was once more dispatched on a mission, this time an exceedingly delicate one. His principal task was to persuade black clergymen and educators that their people should remain in Oklahoma. Thus, the Canadian Government found itself conducting two propaganda campaigns in the United States, with opposite objectives. The intensive effort aimed at luring white Americans to Canada would now be counterbalanced by an equally vigorous campaign to convince black Americans to stay home.

In retrospect, Speers' tactics appear bizarre. Much of his campaign had a religious flavor, meant to appeal to the beliefs and emotions of the black clergy. Rev. S.S. Jones, President of the Oklahoma Baptist State Convention, received a particularly eloquent plea,

> The jewish [sic] people, for example, in their strange wanderings and vagaries over the world, are scattered in every country and are still looking for their return to Jerusalem, and you know by their history, how they have suffered in many countries. They say to this day... 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Name ever Dear to me'. I might add that many coloured people who persist in going to other countries, breaking up their homes, wasting what they have accumulated through frugality and industry, dissatisfied in their own sphere, unless they take the advice set forth by you, will use the words, 'Oklahoma, Oklahoma, Name Ever Dear to Me. When will my troubles have an end, in Joy and Peace and Thee'.[104]

Speers' methods were apparently effective. A highly impressed Rev. Jones promised to use his influence "to retard the movement of my people to that cold country, believing it to be in their interest."[105] In an editorial, the Baptist Informer, a widely read black newspaper, agreed wholeheartedly with Speers' arguments,

> ...so far as I am concerned I don't expect to go to Canada, nor Mexico nor any other place. I am going to stay in Oklahoma; when I leave here I am going to heaven.
>
> The Negro in Oklahoma should quit selling his land and possessions and running around over these United States and foreign countries. Let your bucket down and fight it out right here.[106]

May 1911, was an auspicious month for the Immigration Branch. Several significant events made a gradual waning of black interest in Canada seem likely. First, there was the conspicuous success of Agent Speers' trip to Oklahoma. Speers was confident that he had made a lasting impression on many influential black leaders and that he had also convinced a number of American railways to cease encouraging blacks to emigrate. Then, on May 22, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the "Grandfather Act", which had disfranchised much of Oklahoma's black population, was unconstitutional. The Immigration Branch hoped this action would eliminate much of the discontent among Oklahoma blacks.[107] Finally, on May 23, the Department learned that the Haslam Land and Investment Company had abandoned its previously announced plan to bring 150 blacks into Alberta. Public opposition and government pressure had soured them on the proposal.[108] Encouraged by these reports, W.J. White assured the Edmonton Bulletin on June 5, that "the immigration of Negro settlers from the U.S. has been effectually checked by a quiet campaign." According to the Bulletin, the Inspector of U.S. Agencies was certain that changes to existing legislation would not be necessary.[109]

But in actual fact, Oliver had tried to introduce restrictive legislation only the week before. On May 31, he presented to Cabinet an Order in Council under Section 38c of the Immigration Act, "...that for a period of one year... the landing in Canada shall be prohibited of any immigrant belonging to the Negro race, which race is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada."[110] It seems odd that Oliver chose this time to introduce new regulations. He had been struggling with the problem for well over a year without resorting to such drastic measures. And events during the month of May made it seem likely that the government's campaign of dissuasion and informal restriction would soon be crowned with success. From a practical standpoint, the new regulations were unnecessary. But politically, they may have been essential. On March 23, Edward G. Robinson, the Assistant Superintendent of Immigration, had warned Oliver to expect a serious political backlash from the west,

> You are well aware of the manner in which the residents of British Columbia received what they termed the neglect of action on the part of the government and the manner in which they expressed their disapproval...I fail to see wherein negroes are more desirable than the yellow races, and if some drastic action to prevent the threatened influx is not taken, the Government is likely to receive the same reprimand from portions of Alberta and Saskatchewan to which the Negroes are proceeding.[111]

Oliver was forced to choose between two equally undesirable alternatives. He could quietly continue the informal exclusion campaign and risk losing his political power base. Or he could appease his constituents by taking strong measures to counter the immigration of blacks and accept the risks entailed in openly discriminating. Oliver chose the latter option. Undoubtedly, it was the choice which most appealed to his own views on immigration. Nevertheless, the Order in Council was never enacted. Likely, it was vetoed by Laurier. With a federal election in the near future, the Prime Minister wished to avoid irritating black voters unnecessarily. Moreover, there was the constant risk of a diplomatic rift with the United States. And lastly, Laurier may have considered the informal program of restriction already in effect, sufficient to keep black Americans out of Canada.[112]

With legislative action ruled out, the Immigration Branch renewed its propaganda activities in Oklahoma. Mindful that many black clergymen were actively encouraging the movement, Immigration officials decided to oppose it on the same terms. They hired a black clergyman, G.W. Miller of Chicago, and sent him to Oklahoma to preach against emigration. During the months of June and July, Miller sent the Superintendent of Immigration daily reports of his visits to the heavily black Oklahoma towns of Muskogee, Okmulgee, Weleetka, Clearview, Boley, Guthrie, Oklahoma City, Watongo, Bristow, and Sapulpa. In one of his progress reports, Miller described his tactics,

> I begin by describing minutely what happened to me at the boundary when I entered Canada and continue by describing my interview with the Commissioner of Immigration...the description of the snowstorm which I witnessed during my trip to Canada; the short season, the late frost in June and the early frost in August...My aim in talking to these people is not only to discourage their going to Canada but to make them see that they have much to be thankful for here in this country so rich in soil and climate.[113]

Reportedly, Miller also told his listeners that he had "seen the coloured people frozen along the roadside, just like fenceposts and that they would remain in that position until the spring thaw out."[114]

Miller's stories were apparently as effective as they were lurid. On July 17, he reported that his unfavorable depictions of Canada had spread throughout the state and as a result, "The Canadian boom is rapidly dying out."[115]

For a time, it seemed that Miller was correct. The last few months of 1911 were relatively quiet. In November, Oliver boasted to Parliament that the immigration of blacks had "to all intents and purposes, ceased."[116] At that point, Oliver was no longer speaking as Minister of the Interior. On September 21, 1911, the Laurier government had been defeated at the polls by Robert Borden's Conservative party. But the lull in black immigration for which Oliver claimed credit, proved to be only temporary. In February 1912, the Kansas City agent reported that not all blacks had given up their dreams of Canada,

> For a time it appeared as if the 'Coloured Movement' from this field Canada-ward had been checked to such an extent that it seemed reasonable to suppose this problem would furnish little if any further difficulty. But recent developments clearly point to the fact that the question is by no means settled. Evidences are multiplying which show beyond all doubt that hundreds of coloured families are planning to move to western Canada when spring opens.[117]

Conditions in Oklahoma had not improved with the judicial overturning of the "Grandfather Act". In fact, they were becoming worse, making blacks more anxious than ever to leave the state and less apt to be discouraged by the Immigration Branch's stories of hard work and a harsh climate. One hopeful black immigrant wrote the Branch, "I am not afraid of cold and hardships as I know nothing else."[118]

Robert Rogers, the new Conservative Minister of the Interior, and the Immigration Branch acted swiftly to counter the renewed threat of black immigration. A Canadian Government Agent was posted directly to Oklahoma City to cut off the immigration at its source. Dr. Jones, the black clergyman who had been so impressed by Agent Speers' propaganda, was placed on the Department payroll and assigned the task of dissuading blacks from emigrating.[119] And White caution-ed the American railways which operated between Oklahoma and the Canadian border, that they would have to bear the cost of returning rejected black immigrants to Oklahoma:

> There is no doubt that, unfitted as they are, a great many of them will be rejected at the boundary and the railroads will be forced to take them back, which would mean an expense and inconvenience to the railroads.[120]

The assistance of the American railways greatly aided the government's exclusion effort. It was bad enough that black immigrants had to pay more for rail transportation in Canada than other immigrants. Now it would be increasingly difficult for them to find a railway willing even to transport them to the border. But the government did not yet feel completely secure. The final precaution came in July 1912, when it informed the American Consul-General in Ottawa that blacks would no longer be permitted to enter Canada even as tourists.[122]

After 1912, information in the Immigration Branch's black immigration file becomes sparse. Perhaps black Oklahomans gradually lost interest in Canada, pursuing instead the more promising economic opportunities offered by the northern industrial cities. As well, reports of the ever-increasing numbers of blacks rejected at the Canadian border undoubtedly discouraged many from attempting the trek. And finally, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, had a generally dampening effect on all forms of immigration. But for whatever reason, the immigration of thousands of Oklahoma blacks into Canada was no longer a serious threat.

Nevertheless, the Immigration Branch remained vigilant. In 1916, despite the severe wartime labour shortage, the Immigration Branch denied a Welland Canal contractor permission to import twenty-five black labourers from Baltimore. Blacks were also excluded from the department's campaign to obtain American farmhands to help with wartime harvests. And black Americans were refused permission to join an all-black Canadian Army Construction Batallion.[123]

The Immigration Branch's caution was justified by occasional increases of black interest in Canada. In 1924, American newspapers published an article claiming that Canada was offering special inducements to black immigrants. The article prompted a barrage of eager inquiries to the Immigration Branch from all over the United States.[124] Some black residents of Alberta actively encouraged those still in the U.S. to immigrate. In 1920, the Manitoba Free Press reported that Rev. George W. Washington of St. Mark's Church of the First-Born in Edmonton planned to settle American blacks in the Peace River district.[125] In 1923, the Alberta Negro Colonization and Settlement Society was established in Edmonton. Its goal was "to colonize and settle Negroes from the different parts of the world on Alberta lands."[126] The ambitious nature of the society's recruitment effort is indicated by the fact that the Immigration Branch received a copy of the society's by-laws from the Canadian Government Agent in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It seems that the society may even have succeeded in convincing some Pennsylvania blacks to emigrate, as the Harrisburg Agent requested instructions for dealing with a certain black who wished to immigrate. He received an interesting response,

> It would be well to write to Mr. Moody and explain to him that some years ago there was a similar movement started to western Canada and while, at the first, it was hoped it would succeed, the Department found it necessary, after seeing the numerous failures, to close down on the movement for the protection of the settlers themselves.[127]

Even at this late date, after almost fifteen years of informal exclusion, the Government was unwilling to be candid about its attitude towards black immigrants. In fact, it was unabashedly attempting to create a new myth, that the Immigration Branch had initially encouraged the immigration of blacks to Canada and regretfully withdrew its support only after repeated failures.

Throughout the 1920s, the prospect of renewed black immigration continued to concern Immigration officials. Border inspectors were exhorted to reject as many black immigrants as possible. Sections of the Immigration Act cited as particularly useful were those concerning immigrants convicted of crimes involving moral turpitude (3d), prostitutes or those living off the avails of prostitution (3e&f), those likely to become a public charge (3j), and individuals of chronic psychopathic inferiority (3k),

> Some inspectors seem to be under the impression that if a coloured person is an American citizen, and appears to be in good health and has the required amount of money, he must be admitted. A strict examination, however, will often reveal some statutory cause for rejection under section 3(d) (e) (f) (j) or (k)...Special attention should be paid to persons

> claiming to be coming to Canada on a visit or returning to homes in Canada. Under Section 33, s.s.13, a cash deposit may be taken from a non-immigrant, and Inspectors are requested to enforce this section in the case of non-immigrants.[128]

And so the vigorous exclusion compaign continued, long after the danger of large-scale black immigration had passed. It will likely never be known how many American blacks successfully avoided the pitfalls of propaganda, border inspections and immigration regulations and entered Canada as immigrants. The records of the Immigration Branch shed no light on the matter since no distinction was made between American immigrants on the basis of race. The only black immigrants enumerated separately in immigration statistics were those arriving at ocean ports. Records indicate that between the years 1907-1914, 843 blacks came to Canada by ship.[129] Most were from the West Indies and were bound for Ontario and the Maritimes, regions which already had large black populations. Apart from the incidents in Estevan and Virden, they caused no controversy and attracted little attention from either the public or the Immigration Branch. Yet ironically, in the west, the arrival of only a few hundred more blacks was enough to spark a serious crisis.

According to the Census, there were only thirty-seven blacks in the North-West Territory in 1901.[130] By 1911, there were 979 blacks in Alberta and 336 in Saskatchewan.[131] After 1911, few black Americans succeeded in crossing the border into Canada. The 1921 Census indicates that Alberta's black population increased by only 69 in the preceding decade and Saskatchewan's by 60.[132] Probably, the added numbers were the result of natural increase rather than immigration. It seems reasonable to conclude therefore, that approximately 1,300 blacks arrived in Alberta and Saskatchewan from the United States during the first two decades of the century. This figure is miniscule considering that a total of 658,587 Americans immigrated to Canada during the years between 1901 and 1911. During the peak year of 1911 alone, 121,451 Americans crossed the border.[133]

The panic engendered by the arrival of such a small group of black immigrants seems grossly disproportionate. Similar opposition to Asian immigrants did not develop until many thousands had actually entered the country. But it seemed that even the thought of black immigration was offensive to western Canadians. Aware of the acute racial strife in the United States, many of them having experienced the situation first-hand, they feared the development of similar problems in western Canada. Another reason for the over reaction may have been the propensity of both promoters and opponents of the movement to exaggerate the number of blacks who had immigrated to Canada or planned to immigrate. Almost every week, newspapers reported the arrival of untold thousands of black Americans. In the absence of more reliable information, Canadians could only imagine themselves being inundated in a black tidal wave. Thus, much of the hysteria was directed at immigrants who existed only in the public imagination.

Yet, it is possible that the much feared massive immigration of blacks could indeed have taken place. American blacks had established a long tradition of migration movements, culminating in the massive migrations to Kansas and Oklahoma. The social and political conditions for another migration certainly existed in the Oklahoma of 1910-11. In the light of this, and given the attitudes of western Canadians, the Immigration Branch may have been justified in the measures it took to restrict black immigration. These measures, heavy-handed though they may have been, accurately reflected both the public will and the Immigration Branch's long-established and widely accepted policy of discouraging the immigration of seemingly unassimilable peoples.

Footnotes

[1] Lynwode Pereira to J.S. Crawford, 23 January 1899, Immigration Branch Records, R.G. 76, Vol.192, File 72552, pt.1, Public Archives of Canada, (hereafter referred to as I.B.R.).

[2] Frank Pedley to C.J. Broughton, 3 February 1902, I.B.R., pt.1.

[3] Harold Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply (Toronto: Griffen House, 1972), p. 124.

[4] L.M. Fortier to W.A. Lamb-Campbell, 6 September 1906, I.B.R., pt.1.

[5] Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, p. 127.

[6] W.D. Scott to George Hilbert, 8 September 1905, I.B.R., pt.1.

[7] W.D. Scott to H.L. George, 21 April 1909, I.B.R., pt.1.

[8] A.A. Crimm to J. Bruce Walker, 27 July 1909, I.B.R., pt.1.

[9] Barney McKay to Clifford Sifton, 27 October 1901, I.B.R., pt.1; James Stachan to Clifford Sifton, 21 July 1902, I.B.R., pt.1.

[10] Stephen W. Hill to Clifford Sifton, 6 October 1903, I.B.R., pt.1.

[11] George Simmons to Clifford Sifton, 19 October 1902, I.B.R., pt.1.

[12] John Steinbrecker to Frank Oliver, 13 May 1908, I.B.R., pt.1.

[13] J.Bruce Walker to W.D. Scott, 21 August 1908, I.B.R., pt.1.

[14] D.R. Davies to J. Bruce Walker, 21 August 1908, I.B.R., pt.1.

[15] George Clingan to J.Bruce Walker, 21 August 1908, I.B.R., pt.1.

[16] W.L. Barnstead to W.D. Scott, 31 August 1908, I.B.R., pt.1.

[17] W.D. Scott to D. McNicoll, 26 August 1908, I.B.R., pt.1.

[18] J.S. Crawford to Frank Pedley, 17 January 1908, I.B.R., pt.1.

[19] J.S. Crawford to W.D. Scott, 26 March 1910, I.B.R., pt.1.

[20] Ottawa Free Press, April 1908, I.B.R., pt.1.

[21] Robin Winks, The Blacks in Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 302.

[22] Edmonton Capital, 19 January 1910.

[23] Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, "Black Settlers in Alberta," CALUM (University of Calgary Alumni Association, September-October 1980), p.9.

[24] Winks, Blacks in Canada, p. 302

[25] F. Fisher to Frank Oliver, 12 April 1910, I.B.R., pt.1.

[26] A.C. Lancey to Frank Oliver, 15 April 1910, I.B.R., pt.1.

[27] Census of Canada, 1911, Vol. I, p.440.

[28] Edmonton Bulletin, 8 May 1911.

[29] John Powell to Frank Oliver, 2 March 1910, I.B.R., pt.1.

[30] J.Bruce Walker to W.D. Scott, 14 March 1910, I.B.R., pt.1.

[31] Statutes of Canada, 1910, Department of the Interior, Orders in Council, p. cxxxix.

[32] W.D. Scott to J.S. Crawford, 22 March 1910, I.B.R., pt.1.

[33] Frank Oliver to J.Bruce Walker, 31 March 1910, I.B.R., pt.1.

[34] W.W. Berry to W.J. White, 27 May 1910, I.B.R., pt.1.

[35] Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, p. 135.

[36] W.J. White to Frank Oliver, 13 September 1910, I.B.R., pt.2.

[37] C.W. Speers to W.D. Scott, 26 October 1910, I.B.R., pt.1. Speers' figures are likely not completely accurate but are nonethless useful as an estimate of the black population of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

[38] C.W. Speers to W.D. Scott, 26 October 1910, I.B.R., pt.2.

[39] W.J. White to Frank Oliver, 14 September 1910, I.B.R., pt.2.

[40] J.S. Crawford to Frank Oliver, 2 December 1910, I.B.R., pt.2.

[41] Trevor Sessing, "How They Kept Canada Almost Lily White", Saturday Night (September 1970), p.32.

[42] Winks, Blacks in Canada, p. 307.

[43] F.C. Blais to F.W. Gershaw, 3 August 1934, I.B.R., pt. 7.

[44] W.D. Scott to J.H. MacGill, 1 May 1911, I.B.R., pt.4.

[45] Canada Sessional Papers, 1915, No. 25, vol.19, pt. II, p. 74-75.

[46] F.C. Blais to Gillmor, 27 October 1936, I.B.R., pt.7.

[47] Canada Sessional Papers, 1913, No. 25, vol.18, pt. II, p. 117.

[48] W.J. White to J. Bruce Walker, 4 January 1911, I.B.R., pt. 2.

[49] W.D. Scott to W.J. Webster, 5 January 1911, I.B.R., pt. 2.

[50] Boston Post, 24 February 1911, I.B.R., pt. 2.

[51] Edmonton Journal, 22 May 1911.

[52] Winks, Blacks in Canada, p. 311.

[53] F. Blais to W.E.B. Dubois, 7 March 1911, I.B.R., pt. 2.

[54] Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, p. 144.

[55] "The Immigration Act", 9 - 10 Edw.7, c.47 s.19.

[56] W.H. Rogers to W.D. Scott, 6 April 1911, I.B.R., pt.4.

[57] Edmonton Journal, 17 April 1911.

[58] B.H. Bradford to W.D. Scott, 13 April 1912, I.B.R., pt. 5.

[59] Colin A. Thomson, Blacks in Deep Snow (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1979), p. 80.

[60] Manitoba Free Press, 25 March 1911, I.B.R., pt.4.

[61] Thomson, Blacks in Deep Snow, p. 79.

[62] J.S. Crawford to W.D. Scott, 31 December 1910, I.B.R., pt. 2.

[63] Calgary Herald, 22 April 1911.

[64] Edmonton Bulletin, 21 March 1911.

[65] Edward G. Robinson to Frank Oliver, 23 March 1911, I.B.R., pt.4.

[66] Newspaper article, 28 March 1911, I.B.R., pt. 1.

[67] Manitoba Free Press, 25 March 1911, I.B.R., pt.4.

[68] Edmonton Journal, 30 March 1911; Edmonton Journal, 11 April 1911.

[69] Edmonton Bulletin, 22 April 1911.

[70] Newspaper article, 13 April 1911, I.B.R., pt.5.

[71] Calgary Herald, 6 March 1911.

[72] Edmonton Bulletin, 7 April 1911.

[73] Edmonton Journal, 7 April 1911.

[74] Lethbridge Daily News, 8 April 1911, I.B.R., pt.4.

[75] Newspaper article, 13 April 1911, I.B.R., pt.5.

[76] 18 April 1911, I.B.R., pt. 3.

[77] Thomson, Blacks in Deep Snow, p. 80.

[78] Harold Troper, "The Creek Negroes of Oklahoma and Canadian Immigration 1909-1911", Candian Historical Review (1972), p. 281.

[79] Edmonton Bulletin, 27 April 1911.

[80] Wilfrid Laurier Papers, C903, C904, C905, Public Archives of Canada. (hereafter referred to as the Laurier Papers). The Alberta Boards of Trade were Calgary, Strathcona, Red Deer, Lloydminster, Leduc, Lacombe, Morinville, Athabasca and Holden. The others were Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Melfort, Yorkton and Battleford.

[81] Resolution of the Strathcona Board of Trade, 5 May 1911, I.B.R., pt. 3; Resolution of the Morinville Board of Trade, 29 April 1911, I.B.R., pt.3.

[82] Resolution of the Battleford Board of Trade, 8 May 1911, Laurier Papers, C904, p. 185961; Resolution of the Red Deer Board of Trade, 6 June 1911, Laurier Papers, C905, p. 186887; Resolution of the Saskatoon Board of Trade, 27 April 1911, Laurier Papers, C903, pp. 185400 - 185401.

[83] Athabasca Board of Trade to Frank Oliver, 3 April 1911, I.B.R., pt. 3.

[84] Newspaper article, 9 May 1911, I.B.R., pt. 1.

[85] F. Crosskill to Frank Oliver, 28 April 1911, I.B.R., pt.3.

[86] Laurier Papers, C903, C904, C905.

[87] I.O.D.E., Edmonton Branch to Frank Oliver, 31 March 1911, I.B.R., pt. 3.

[88] W.C.T.U. to Wilfrid Laurier, 16 April 1911, Laurier Papers, C903, p. 184942.

[89] 18 April 1911, Laurier Papers, C903, pp. 184940-184941.

[90] Edmonton Bulletin, 8 May 1911.

[91] Edmonton Journal, 1 June 1911.

[92] Edmonton Bulletin, 8 May 1911.

[93] Edmonton Journal, 22 April 1911.

[94] Edmonton Journal, 8 April 1911.

[95] House of Commons Debates, 1910-11, vol.III, 22 March 1911, col. 5911 - 5914.

[96] Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply*, p. 138. Troper gives several additional examples of the reaction of the eastern press.

[97] *Edmonton Journal*, 24 March 1911.

[98] Ibid., 27 March 1911.

[99] *Calgary Herald*, 28 March 1911.

[100] *Edmonton Journal*, 13 May 1911.

[101] Ibid., 16 May 1911.

[102] Ibid., 21 April 1911.

[103] *Edmonton Bulletin*, 30 May 1911.

[104] C.W. Speers to Rev. S.S. Jones, 24 May 1911, I.B.R., pt. 4.

[105] Rev. S.S. Jones to W.D. Scott, 20 May 1911, I.B.R., pt.4.

[106] *The Baptist Informer*, date unknown, I.B.R., pt.4.

[107] W.J. White to Frank Oliver, 24 May 1911, I.B.R., pt. 4.

[108] J. Bruce Walker to Frank Oliver, 23 May 1911, I.B.R., pt. 4.

[109] *Edmonton Bulletin*, 5 June 1911.

[110] 31 May 1911, I.B.R., pt.4.

[111] Edward G. Robinson to Frank Oliver, 23 March 1911, I.B.R., pt.4.

[112] Troper, "The Creek Negroes of Oklahoma and Canadian Immigration", p. 283.

[113] G.W. Miller to W.D. Scott, 17 July 1911, I.B.R., pt. 1.

[114] F.C. Blais to Gillmor, 27 October 1936, I.B.R., pt.7.

[115] G.W. Miller to W.D. Scott, 17 July 1911,I.B.R., pt.1.

[116] House of Commons Debates, 1911-12, vol. I, 30 November 1911, Col. 606.

[117] W.H. Rogers to W.D. Scott, 15 February 1912, I.B.R., pt. 5.

[118] Paul Groves to W.D. Scott, 3 October 1913, I.B.R., pt. 5.

[119] W.D. Scott to W.H. Rogers, 20 February 1912, I.B.R., pt. 5.

[120] 23 February 1912, I.B.R., pt. 5.

[121] W.J. White to Robert Rogers, 3 March 1912, I.B.R., pt. 5.

[122] W.D. Scott to John E. Foster, 11 July 1912, I.B.R., pt. 5.

[123] W.D. Scott letter, 30 May 1916; W.D. Scott letter, 6 November 1916, I.B.R., pt. 5.

[124] Letters to Immigration Branch officials, January 1924-February 1925, I.B.R., pt.6.

[125] *Manitoba Free Press*, 31 July 1920, I.B.R., pt.6.

[126] "Constitution and By-Laws - The Alberta Negro Colonization and Settlement Society", I.B.R., pt.6.

[127] F.C. Blais to Canadian Government Agent, Harrisburg, Penn., 27 January 1923, I.B.R., pt. 6.

[128] Thomas Pedley to Border Inspectors, 2 July 1920, I.B.R., pt. 6.

[129] *Canada Sessional Papers*, 1910, no.25, Vol. 15, pt. II, p.6; 1911, no.25, Vol. 16, pt. II, p.6; 1912, no.25, Vol. 17, pt. II, p.14; 1913, no.25, Vol. 19, pt. II, pp. 16-17; 1915, no.25, Vol. 19, pt.II, p.8.

[130] *Census of Canada*, 1901, vol. 1, pp. 392-403.

[131] *Census of Canada*, 1911, vol. 1, pp. 163 & 317.

[132] *Census of Canada,* 1921, vol. 1, p. 355. See table, p. 160.

[133] *Canada Yearbook*, 1905, p. 316; *Canada Yearbook*, 1908, p. 494; *Canada Yearbook*, 1912, p. 43.

CHAPTER 5: Amber Valley: The Establishment and Development of a Black Community

As a result of the immigration from Oklahoma, Alberta had several well-defined pockets of black settlement by 1911. Almost 40% of the black immigrants settled in the province's two major urban centres where they found employment as construction labourers or railway porters. The largest number lived in Edmonton which had 298 black residents, compared with Calgary which had only seventy-two. Another forty blacks were scattered among the towns and villages of central and southern Alberta. Most of the remaining 581 black Albertans lived on homesteads in four heavily-black rural centres: Campsie near Barrhead; Breton, south-west of Edmonton; Junkins (now known as Wildwood) on the Canadian Northern Line east of Edson; and Amber Valley (originally Pine Creek), located east of the town of Athabasca.[1] The focus of this chapter is Amber Valley, the largest and most successful black settlement in Alberta.[2]

In many ways, the story of Amber Valley is a familiar one. Its people shared the same hopes and dreams and the same moments of bleak despair of most Alberta homesteaders. They faced the challenges of isolation, climate, crop failure and unending labour. And yet, because they were black, they were different. Unlike other homesteaders, the blacks of Amber Valley brought with them indelible memories of prejudice and racial violence; memories which inevitably affected their attitudes towards the outside world as well as the type of community they ultimately developed. Moreover, the province's white majority did not expect the blacks of Amber Valley to succeed, believing them to be lazy, mentally inferior, latently criminal and unsuited to the climate. This was a heavy burden of false perceptions with which to begin life in a new country. Even today, misconceptions about Amber Valley abound. Many maintain that the Oklahoma blacks were not given a free choice of locations, that Dominion Land Agents purposely guided them to an isolated area of inferior land. Another common impression is that the blacks were indifferent farmers and the settlement ultimately unsuccessful. But perhaps the most pervasive belief concerning Amber Valley is that from the outset a spirit of harmony and goodwill prevailed between the black homesteaders and their white neighbors.

This chapter will examine the process of settlement and community development in Amber Valley in the light of the mythology which surrounded the settlement at its inception, and still persists in altered form today.

At first glance, the Athabasca region seems a peculiar choice for homestead settlement. In 1910, the little town of Athabasca was isolated and uninviting, tenuously linked to the outside world by a narrow muddy trail. The trip to Edmonton took two days on the stage. Those who travelled by foot could hope to cover a maximum of twenty-five miles per day.[3] As contemporary accounts indicate, the trip was arduous at the best of times, and especially so if the trail was wet,

> The road winds about through the dreary scrub; one mudhole succeeds another, each apparently deeper than the former, and at length the buggy sinks in a creek where mud is bottomless, till nothing is visible but the box which seems to float. In such circumstances the driver is helpless till a friendly freighter comes along and with his heavy team pulls the vehicle onto terra firma.[4]

Upon reaching the Athabasca district, prospective settlers could hardly be blamed for wondering if the trip was worth the effort. Most of the land was covered by swamp and dense poplar or spruce forest. The soil, classified as a "grey, wooded" type, was much inferior in quality to the black loam still available on homesteads elsewhere in the province. Only with careful management could it be expected to produce well. In short, from an agricultural point of view, the Athabasca region was far from impressive. Yet curiously, in 1910, it was considered a highly desirable location for homestead settlement.

The reasons for this unlikely popularity of the Athabasca district may be found in the little known story of the town of Athabasca itself. By 1910, it had already enjoyed a relatively long and exciting history. Founded in 1875 as a Hudson's Bay Company transportation centre, it achieved world-wide fame during the 1890s as part of the "All-Canadian" route to the Yukon goldfields. During the decade following the gold rush, the first intrepid homesteaders arrived, filing on quarter sections close to the existing settlement.[5] But until 1910, Athabasca's growth was slow. Then, fuelled by rumors of railways, reports of bumper crops and unabashed boosterism, the sleepy settlement was suddenly transformed into a boom town.

The prospect of extensive railway development provided the first boost to Athabasca's fortunes. In 1910, the Trans-Canada Pacific and Hudson's Bay Company Railway announced plans to construct a line from Hudson Bay to the newly opened Peace River district by way of the town of Athabasca. The Canadian Northern Railway proposed the construction of two lines to the settlement, one from North Battleford and the other from Edmonton. Even the mighty Canadian Pacific Railway was rumored to have plans of extending its line from Lloydminster to Athabasca.[6] Alas, only one of these railroads was ever to materialize, the Canadian Northern branchline from Edmonton, completed in 1912. But in those heady days of 1910, it seemed that Athabasca was destined to become the most important transportation centre in northern Alberta.

Naturally, the expectation of railway development considerably brightened the district's agricultural prospects. Moreover, exaggerated reports of good soil and exceptionally high initial yields fuelled hopes that the Athabasca district would become the province's major grain producer. Under the ideal climatic conditions which prevailed during 1909 and 1910, Athabasca farmers produced a per acre average of 26 bushels of wheat, 61 bushels of oats and 38 bushels of barley.[7] These figures are considerably higher than the average yield per acre in later years of 19 bushels of wheat, 31 bushels of oats and 23 bushels of barley.[8] Optimistically the Athabasca Northern News urged farmers to grow wheat, the crop that would "Boom the Landing".[9]

Athabasca's numerous boosters energetically trumpeted the town's prospects. A blizzard of promotional pamphlets descended upon the United States, Britain and eastern Canada, courtesy of the ambitious and newly established Athabasca Board of Trade. The pamphlets, predicting that Athabasca would become a major industrial centre and Alberta's third largest city, were also reprinted in the Edmonton Bulletin, Manitoba Free Press, Toronto Globe and Montreal's Family Herald and Weekly Star.[10] As well, the Athabasca Northern News, oriented more to blatant boosterism than to journalism, was distributed widely throughout Alberta.

The propaganda campaign proved irresistibly attractive to settlers and shysters alike. The town of Athabasca virtually exploded, increasing in population from 200 in 1910 to almost 2,000 three years later.[11] With the people came business and industry and all the trappings of a metropolis. By 1912, long distance telephone service was established, an extensive water system was being installed, gas pipe was purchased and street cars were on order. As the town grew, the price of land escalated rapidly. Town lots which were worth $300 in 1910, sold for $3,000 to $5,000 in 1912.[12]

Unfortunately, it did not take long for Athabasca's bubble to burst. The decline began with a fire in 1913 which destroyed most of the business district. Soon after, all the railroads but one cancelled their plans to build through Athabasca and the Hudson's Bay Company decided to move its quarters to Fort McMurray. The inevitable result of these fateful events was an exodus of townspeople and settlers from which Athabasca never recovered. Soon the ambitious little town was little more than an agricultural service centre.[13]

Athabasca's heyday may have been short-lived, but while it lasted, the town was probably the most exciting spot in Alberta. Undoubtedly therefore, the earliest black settlers came to the Athabasca region of their own accord, attracted by the glowing publicity reports and rumors of railways and productive soil. Later arrivals followed because of a wish to settle close to relatives or friends or simply to be near members of their own race. For Jefferson Davis Edwards, this wish was foremost in his mind when he arrived in Edmonton in July 1910,

> When I first came and was wondering where to go the talk around the Immigration Hall in Edmonton was about this land up north. How it was good land, good for wheat and mixed farming. So I wanted to investigate it. Also some coloured folks had already taken up a homestead there. I guess we are just like other people. Take a Frenchman, if a Frenchman settles in a place, other Frenchmen will settle near him. If a Ukrainian locates in a place then the Ukrainians move in. I guess that is the way it is with us.[14]

After completing the arduous trek from Edmonton, the Oklahoma blacks did not linger long in the immediate vicinity of the town of Athabasca. By 1910, most of the best land near the community had already been taken up by white homesteaders. Americans were the predominant group, forming 39% of the white population, followed by 25% Canadian, 19% British and 17% European.[15] In keeping with the tradition established during the earlier migrations to Kansas and Oklahoma, the blacks sought isolation from the white population and the opportunity to establish a self-sufficient all-black community. Finally they halted some fifteen miles east of the town of Athabasca, in a district already known as Pine Creek and which they later re-named Amber Valley.

There are few sources of accurate information concerning the establishment of the black settlement of Amber Valley. The most reliable are the Homestead Records of the Department of the Interior which contain a wealth of information about the origins, age, family size and agricultural activities of Alberta homesteaders. An examination of the records reveals that between 1910 and 1913 approximately 317 black men, women and children settled on ninety-five homesteads in the Amber Valley area. Twenty-two homesteads were claimed in 1910, followed by thirty-six during the peak settlement year of 1911 and thirty-seven during the two succeeding years.[16]

The black homesteaders differed in many ways from their white neighbors. The average age of the black settlers was thirty-six. More than 60% were married, with an average family size of four.[17] In contrast, a study of 129 Athabasca area settlers contained in a M.A. thesis, "The Process of Rural Settlement in the Athabasca Area, Alberta" by Donald Stone, indicates that the average age of Athabasca settlers was thirty-four. Slightly less than half of the Athabasca settlers studied were married, with an average family size of three.[18]

The pattern of land settlement in Amber Valley differed significantly from other Athabasca districts which were settled by whites. Most American and European immigrants arrived in Alberta as individuals or with members of their immediate family. In contrast, the Oklahoma blacks immigrated in large, extended family units, typically consisting of a middle-aged man with his married sons and their families. In one instance, the family bond was so strong that a father forced his pregnant daughter to accompany the family to Canada, even though her husband refused to leave Oklahoma.[19] Upon arrival in Amber Valley, each extended family generally settled in a cluster of adjoining homesteads. Proximity to family and sometimes to friends,was the single most important factor in determining a black homesteader's choice of location. Consequently, fifty-two of the ninety-five Amber Valley homesteaders settled on one township (T66, R20, W4). This township contained the best quality land and attracted most of the settlers who arrived in 1910 and 1911. The next most heavily settled township was T65, R21, W4, which attracted seventeen black settlers. Another fourteen Oklahoma homesteaders settled on T66, R21, W4, and the remaining twelve were scattered in clusters on three adjoining townships.[20] Frequently, the black settlers selected inferior land which was located close to their family and friends rather than better quality land which was further away.[21]

Proximity to water appears to have been the second most important factor in determining their choice of location. Perhaps drawing from their experience in hot, arid Oklahoma, the black homesteaders were anxious to secure a reliable source of water for their livestock. Hence, during the initial year of settlement, 41% filed on land through which a creek ran. During the following year, 1911, only 14% of the new arrivals were able to obtain creek land.[22]

In terms of the type of vegetative cover preferred, the black settlers differed notably from their white neighbors. Stone found that most Athabasca area settlers selected land covered with swamp or scrub as it was easiest to clear, followed by woodland and brulé. Curiously, the black Oklahomans reversed the order of preference, choosing woodland (44%) over scrub (31%), swamp (16%) and brulé (9%).[23] The reason for their strong preference for wooded land is unclear. One factor may have been a desire for a convenient supply of firewood and building materials. Or, the black homesteaders may have felt that game would be more readily available on woodland.[24]

At the best of times, life on a northern Alberta homestead was harsh and demanding. The black settlers of Amber Valley found the initial period of adjustment to an entirely new way of life in an isolated community particularly difficult. It took two days to make the return trip to Athabasca for groceries and supplies, three or four days in wet weather. From Athabasca it was at least another two days to Edmonton and the world outside.[25] Furthermore, the black settlers were as isolated culturally as they were physically. Accustomed to the large black communities of the American south, they now found themselves forming a tiny black presence in an overwhelmingly white province.

The unfamiliar climate of northern Alberta caused great hardship during the first few years. Despite the federal government's warnings of blizzards and freezing cold, many of the black Oklahomans arrived without heavy clothing and warm footwear. The severe winter of 1910-11 caught them unawares. With the mercury plunging to -54° C. in January, the black settlers huddled together in communal shelters while most of their livestock died from the cold.[26]

Once the snow had melted, the settlers faced yet another ordeal. Most of them as Jeff Edwards remembered, had settled on land covered with dense growths of poplar and spruce: "It was nothing but bush. If you wanted to see the sun you had to look straight up. You couldn't see anything if you looked sideways."[27] Clearing this land was a slow, backbreaking task. Most of the work was done by hand, with the aid of only an axe and a grub hoe. The cut timber was piled and burned while the tree stumps, ranging up to three feet in diameter, were uprooted by teams of oxen.[28] Hordes of sandflies and mosquitoes tormented both the helpless beasts and the men, who covered themselves with netting from head to waist.[29] Because of the deneness of the bush, few Amber Valley settlers managed to clear thirty acres of land within three years, as required by homestead regulations. Aware of their difficulties, the government granted them an extension of time and eventually reduced the requirement to fifteen acres.[30]

Even after the land was cleared, the Amber Valley settlement was plagued with misfortune. Often, the draft horses which the settlers had brought from Oklahoma did not survive long in the Athabasca bush. They readily succumbed to a variety of diseases, most commonly swamp fever and hoof rot. To perform the heavy work of breaking the land and preparing it for cultivation the settlers were forced to acquire small but hardy Indian ponies. They found that five of the ponies were needed to do the work of two good draft horses.[31]

Because the Oklahoma blacks were accustomed to growing only cotton, tobacco or corn, they experienced greater difficulty adapting to Alberta's grain-based agriculture than most homesteaders from Europe, Canada and the northern United States. A succession of disheartening crop failures during the early years intensified their problems. The community's first big seeding year was 1918. Encouraged by excellent growing conditions, the black settlers anticipated high grain yields. But on July 23, the day of the settlement's annual picnic, calamity struck in the form of a heavy frost which wiped out the entire crop.[32] As one settler remembered, it was almost ten years before many Amber Valley families sold their first crops. Before that, all they produced was used for animal feed and seed for the next year's crop.[33]

Despite the many hardships and calamities they encountered, the vast majority of the Amber Valley homesteaders persevered, disproving their critics' claims that blacks were lazy and incapable of surviving in the harsh northern Alberta climate. Only twenty of the original ninety-five Amber Valley settlers abandoned their homesteads before obtaining patent. Seven of these refiled on better land elsewhere in the district while the rest likely returned to the United States. For those who remained, the average length of time required to fulfill the homestead requirements and receive patent on their land was 5.25 years, somewhat longer than the 4.73 years needed by most Athabasca settlers.[34] This difference is best explained by the blacks' preference for wooded land instead of the easily cleared swamp and scrub land favored by white settlers. But nevertheless, 71.5% of the black settlers had received patent by 1920, compared with only 54% of Athabasca area settlers as a whole.[35]

In terms of the improvements made on their homesteads, the sixty-eight Amber Valley settlers who received patent by 1920 compare favorably with the average Athabasca homesteader. The black settlers broke an average of thirty-three acres of land and cropped twenty-eight acres, compared with the regional average of twenty-eight acres broken and twenty-three acres cropped. The average house constructed by Amber Valley residents was valued at $312 and the average barn at $152. According to Stone's findings, the buildings constructed by their white neighbors were somewhat more valuable, averaging $366 for a house and $196 for a barn.

The black farmers owned less livestock, averaging 1.4 horses and 2 cows each, compared with the average of 1.8 horses and 3.9 cows owned by other Athabasca homesteaders. Over a third of the Amber Valley settlers owned neither horses nor cattle though some of these used mules in place of horses and owned considerable numbers of hogs. Virtually every black homesteader kept chickens.[36]

Like most Alberta homesteaders, the blacks of Amber Valley found it necessary to supplement their farm income with outside earnings. The timber which blanketed their homesteads was a major source of revenue. The settlers chopped it into firewood, worth $3.50 a cord, and shipped it out of Athabasca by the carload.[37] Some of the women contributed to the family income by working as laundresses for the residents of Athabasca.[38] During the harvest season and winter months, many men left their families on the homestead and went elsewhere in search of employment. Jeff Edwards worked for another Athabasca area farmer for $35 a month during the summer and autumn of 1911.[39] Other Amber Valley settlers worked as farm labourers near Edmonton and in Saskatchewan.

During the winter of 1911-12 most of the men worked on the construction of the Canadian Northern branchline from Edmonton to Athabasca.[40] Following the completion of the railroad, the most common form of winter employment was hauling freight to the trading posts operated by the Hudson's Bay Company and the Revillon Brothers Company at Wabasca, Lac la Biche, Fort McMurray and Fort Chipewyan. Freighting was a difficult, cold and often hazardous way to earn a living. It took nine days for the heavily laden, horse-drawn sleds to travel the 120 miles from Athabasca to Wabasca. The men who undertook the trip to remote Fort Chipewyan could expect to be away from their homes for two or three months.[41]

Understandably, a large number of the Amber Valley settlers found freighting an unattractive occupation. They preferred to spend the winter months in Edmonton, working in the meat-packing industry, as construction labourers or as hotel porters. Others travelled further afield in their search for employment. The coal mines and logging camps of British Columbia attracted several, and at least one, Willis Bowen, worked on the construction of the Banff Springs Hotel in 1916.[42]

During WWI, the blacks of Amber Valley did not respond to the nation's call to arms as enthusiastically as their fellow Albertans. Between 1914 and 1916, Canadian blacks were encouraged to join those local regiments that would accept them. Among those who enlisted were two of the sons of the well-known southern Alberta rancher, John Ware, one of whom was killed in action. Unfortunately many Canadian whites objected to the prospect of fighting side by side with black soldiers. Col. Sam Hughes, the Minister of Militia and Defense, received disturbingly frequent reports of black volunteers being rejected outright by recruiting officers in Pictou County, St. John and Edmonton. Despite his earlier insistence that the formation of an all-black regiment would be as impracticable as "a regiment of one-eyed men or men with yellow mustaches or red hair", Hughes was forced to yield to demands for a segregated army.[43]

Consequently, the No. 2 (Negro) Construction Battalion was formed on July 5, 1916, and sent to France to undertake logging, milling and shipping work for the army. Recruiting was carried on in all centres of black population. On October 7, 1916, a large article appeared in the Edmonton Journal exhorting, "Colored men to arms! Your liberty is threatened!". Prospective recruits were reminded of the good treatment they had received in Canada and the debt of gratitude they owed the British Empire,

> The men enlisting in the coloured battalion will be in a position to add glory to their race and add to the ever-increasing respect in which they are held throughout the British Empire. The British with their love of free play have fought for the freedom of the coloured people for many years. The law is the same for all races and for this reason in this greatest of all wars in which the great empire has flung down the gauntlet on behalf of liberty and justice men of every race and creed are fighting shoulder to shoulder against the Huns.
>
> The allies are fighting for the liberty of women and children as well as for the liberty of

> the whole human race. Remember that in Canada coloured men have the vote, they may take up homesteads and in every way the law of the country protects them exactly the same as the white race. Remember that in the war for their freedom it is estimated that no less than 80,000 of the British race fought that they might obtain their liberty. The time has come when their freedom and liberty is at stake. With this war lost by the Allies, might would become right, and liberty and freedom become a memory.[44]

The blacks of Amber Valley proved resistant to this appeal. Only five men joined the battalion: Forest Bowen, Columbus Bowen, Joseph Whitaker, Bob Jamieson and Richard Lipscombe.[45] There are several possible reasons for the community's low enlistment rate. The prospect of enlisting in a labour battalion was likely not as enticing to young men as serving in the front lines. Moreover, a war fought in defence of Imperial interests would have little appeal for recent immigrants from the United States. But likely the most important factor discouraging enlistment was the family and financial responsibilities of most of the Amber Valley settlers. The five who enlisted were all single men in their early or mid-twenties. But the majority of the eligible homesteaders were men in their thirties, with unpatented homesteads and families to support. They had too many responsibilities at home to consider enlistment.

Despite the many hardships of the early years, the backbreaking toil, the cold, the isolation and the bitter disappointments, the community of Amber Valley flourished. Like most pioneer communities, much of Amber Valley's success may be attributed to the cooperative efforts and community spirit of its residents. One of the first and most important of the innumerable community endeavors was the establishment of a school. In 1914 the Amber Valley school board was created with Jeff Edwards as its secretary-treasurer. During that same year a 24' x 36' wood-heated frame schoolhouse was built by the men of the community. Named in honour of Nim Toles, one of the first blacks to arrive in the district, the new school welcomed thirty-six students on its first day of classes.[46] All of the children were black, with the exception of the Godbout family, the only white settlers in the area. The school was open for only six months of the year, from May to October, closing for the winter because of the cold.

During its first two years of operations, the Amber Valley school board hired white teachers from outside the region, Norman McKee and Donald McLeod. Each stayed for only a year, discouraged perhaps by the isolation and the annual salary of $390. Between 1916 and 1918, Charles Virtes, an Amber Valley homesteader who had been a teacher in Oklahoma, took over the teaching duties. And in 1918, fortune smiled on the community with the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. W. Cromwell, college-educated blacks from the United States. Prevented by prejudice from securing employment elsewhere, they taught at Toles School until the 1940s.[47] Ironically, the racism which limited the Cromwells' opportunities guaranteed the children of Amber Valley an education far superior to that obtainable at most rural Alberta schools. It is interesting to note that the Cromwells made their mark on the community in more than one way. It was Mrs. Cromwell who in 1932 selected the name of Amber Valley.[48]

By the time the Cromwells arrived, Toles School was bursting at the seams. The original thirty-six students had increased to forty-five, more than any other one room school in the province. So severe was the overcrowding that the children were attending school in shifts, with many of the older ones studying at home. Eventually, a second room was added to the school, making it possible for all the students to attend at once. The extra space also made it practicable for the Cromwells to offer grades 9 and 10, in addition to the eight primary grades, an unusual accomplishment for a rural school.[49]

For the first few years of its existence, Toles School served the community as a church as well as a school. It was not until 1919 that Willis Bowen and Samuel Carothers dismantled an old stone building some miles away and reassembled it to form Amber Valley's first church. The church was interdenominational, serving the Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and Church of God faiths adhered to by members of the community.[50] The lack of religious unity of the people of Amber Valley was likely responsible for the long delay in establishing the church. As well, it likely diminished the role that religion played in the community. For although the blacks of Amber Valley were highly religious, there was no one religious leader or cause which they could all support.

Amber Valley possessed some of the institutions commonly associated with black communities in the United States. An almost unbelievable number of clubs competed for the homesteaders' time and intellectual energies. The Literary Club sponsored debates, poetry readings and theatrical events. The Garden Club, Women's Institute and an enigmatic organization called the Good Community League also flourished. Curiously though, the Eastern Star and black Masonic organizations which enjoyed a lively and controversial existence in most centres of black population, including Edmonton and Junkins, failed to gain a foothold in Amber Valley.

Conspicuous among all the intellectual and community-oriented organizations of Amber Valley is the Marcus Garvey Club. The ultimate aim of this association was emigration to Africa and with this goal in mind it sponsored nurses' training and a variety of self-improvement programs.[51] The existence of the Marcus Garvey Club is indicative of a spirit of black nationalism in Amber Valley.

Undoubtedly, of all Amber Valley's community activities, the most successful and best known were its picnics and baseball teams. An annual community picnic became a tradition very early in the settlement's existence. By the 1920s it had become a mammoth two-day affair, organized and presided over in alternate years by Thomas Mapp and Jeff Edwards. Besides an abundance of southern culinary specialties, the picnic featured horsepulling contests, horse and foot races, baseball tournaments, concerts and dances.[52]

Much of the musical diversion was provided by Amber Valley's all-black dance band which regularly entertained throughout the Athabasca region.[53] But for the people of Amber Valley, the picnic could not be considered a true success unless their team won the baseball tournament. The all-black Amber Valley team, coached and managed by Jeff Edwards for some thirty years, was a dominant force in northern Alberta baseball. The team played in tournaments throughout the province, becoming Amber Valley's best known institution.[54]

Most of Amber Valley's endeavors were successful only because of the cooperation of the entire community. Yet, as in all homesteading settlements, there were a few individuals who stood out because of their special skills, their energy or their enthusiasm. Mrs. Amy Brody, who had trained as a nurse and midwife in the United States, tended the community's sick and presided over births. Thomas Mapp was one of the leading farmers of the Athabasca region, known for his experiments with different grains and new agricultural techniques. Samuel Carothers became Amber Valley's first postmaster and grocer, making the arduous trek by mule team to Edmonton every few weeks to obtain groceries and supplies.[55] And yet another Amber Valley settler, Richard Lipscombe, became widely-acclaimed as the most highly skilled blacksmith in the area.[56]

Foremost among these outstanding residents was Jefferson Davis Edwards. Besides organizing the annual picnic and the baseball team, he coached a succession of black pugilistic hopefuls, each of whom achieved a degree of distinction as the "Athabasca Kid".[57] As well, the indefatigable Edwards served on the Athabasca Hospital Board, the Athabasca Agricultural Society and became almost a permanent fixture of the Amber Valley School Board. He was appointed by the federal government as the area's enumerator in 1917 and served as census taker in 1921 and 1931. And finally, Edwards played an active role in the establishment of the United Grain Growers, for which he later received an Alberta Pioneer Award from Premier Peter Lougheed.[58]

Despite its isolation, Amber Valley maintained close links with the other black communities in Alberta. Many Amber Valley settlers worked in Edmonton during the winter or else had close relatives in the city whom they visited frequently. The annual picnic was instrumental in promoting unity and friendly relations among the province's blacks. Blacks from the rural communities of Junkins and Campsie attended in force and many Edmonton blacks arranged their annual vacations to coincide with the picnic. Many young Amber Valley residents met their future marriage partners at the picnic, forming new familial relations which further bonded the different communities together.[59]

Unfortunately, relations with the white population of the Athabasca region were not nearly as cordial. The blacks of Amber Valley encountered considerable prejudice when they moved beyond the bounds of their own community. They were not allowed to attend dances or other social functions in the town of Athabasca or in districts of mixed black and white settlement. Few whites attended the dances held at Toles School. Discrimination made it virtually impossible for blacks to obtain employment or accommodation in Athabasca.[60] Consequently, the 1911 Census lists only one black resident in the town. By 1921, there were only four.[61] Not surprisingly; intermarriage between the black and white communities was virtually unknown. The first mixed marriage took place during the 1930s and interestingly, involved a white girl who had only recently arrived in the district. Generally, it would appear that the blacks of Amber Valley were considered socially acceptable only as entertainers in a dance band or as athletes on a baseball diamond or in a boxing ring. But often even these activities were marred by racial incidents. Fistfights and racial epithets were an inevitable accompaniment to baseball games, especially when Amber Valley played its arch-rival, the team from Athabasca.[62]

On occasion, racial discrimination affected even the multi-talented Jeff Edwards. In 1921 the Athabasca town clerk and a number of other residents attempted unsuccessfully to prevent his appointment as census enumerator.[63] In the light of this incident and the prevailing attitude of racial discrimination, it seems curious that Edwards was so successful in obtaining appointments to various boards and associations in Athabasca. Possibly, he was recognized as an outstanding individual whose abilities transcended the barriers of colour. Or his appointments may have resulted from a notion of "corporate representation". The white community may have felt compelled to accept a representative from Amber Valley because the black settlement made up so large a part of the region's population.

Alberta's other black communities experienced similar problems of racial discrimination. In 1924, the Edmonton Journal Farm Weekly reported on the case of a Campsie black charged with assaulting a teacher who refused to allow his children to attend school. The article ended with the ominous observation, "There is considerable feeling in the district between the white and black elements."[64] The situation in Junkins appears to have been no better, although inexplicably, a local black, Emmanuel C. Rouse, was a delegate to the National Conservative Convention in 1930.[65]

It seems likely that the worst situation was in Edmonton, which had the largest concentration of blacks. Racism was most apparent during the height of the controversy over black immigration. In December 1910, the Edmonton Journal reported that a number of white restaurant patrons had left angrily when a "well-dressed black couple" entered.[66] Blacks were denied service in two Edmonton taverns in 1912, apparently with the approval of the Attorney-General's department. The Edmonton Capital reported,

> Irate Negroes were turned down services in two hotels. They ask "Have Edmonton bartenders the right to draw the colour line?" The attorney-general's department said while it gives the hotel keeper the right to sell liquor, "it cannot compel him to sell to anyone if he does not wish to do so". All this in

> spite the Negroes were togged out in the most fashionable of American clothes, almost dandified in their get-up and bearing.[67]

Also in 1912, the Edmonton Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union demanded only white labour in the city's hotels.[68] And in May 1912, the Royal Alexandra Hospital publicly denied reports that people were being denied admission due to "class or colour".[69]

Lurid reports of black crime were a favorite feature of the Edmonton Journal during 1912. An article in March, headlined, "Many Dope Fiends Infest Edmonton" reported the bungled attempt of an "old white-haired negro" to obtain cocaine from a Jasper Avenue pharmacist at gunpoint.[70] In March, under the headline, "Jungle Woman's Teeth Ineffectual Defense" the Journal reported a black woman's attempt to resist arrest by fastening "two shining rows of teeth in the forearm of the plainclothesman".[71] On August 16, fifty men and women were arrested in a raid on the Afro-Canadian Coloured Club in Edmonton and charged with being inmates or frequenters of a disorderly house. Interestingly, a city alderman's unexplained involvement in this case resulted in a scandal and the subsequent resignation of the Chief of Police.[72] Ten days later, the club was raided again and twelve blacks were arrested for gambling.[73] Also during August, a black real estate agent, Clifford E. Mitchell, fled the city, leaving behind an unsavory record of embezzlement and fraud.[74] And in October, a startling headline appeared in the Journal, "Gang of Negresses Prey on White

Men". The accompanying article explained that three black women had been charged with theft and vagrancy after dragging a number of inebriated men into the CNR yards and robbing them.[75] Doubtless this story provided food for thought for those Edmontonians who were already deeply concerned about the supposed threat black men posed to the virtue of white women. But the Edmonton Journal notwithstanding, the black immigrants do not appear to have been the fierce criminals that many Albertans expected. Unfortunately, the records of the Edmonton Police Department are missing for these years. But the Alberta Provincial Police files contain evidence of only one black crime. It concerned a black woman in Lethbridge who was accused in 1923 of abducting a black child whom she had been babysitting and fleeing to the United States.[76] Undoubtedly, many blacks participated in the barroom brawls and rowdy violence characteristic of a society one step removed from the frontier. There were also likely some who became involved in the seamier aspects of Alberta life; prostitution, gambling and the drug trade. But these were a minority. On the whole, Alberta's blacks seem to have been a peaceable, law-abiding people, in fact remarkably so considering the harassment and provocation they continually encountered.

In time Edmontonians would lose their obsession with the supposed criminality of the black race. But the racial discrimination continued unabated. During the 1920s and 1930s it was as difficult for a black to find employment and accommodation in Edmonton as it was in Athabasca.[77] Daily life was often a succession of petty harassments. In 1924 the Edmonton City Commissioner banned blacks from public parks and swimming pools, a decision which was later overruled by city council. At least one Edmonton hospital refused to accept blacks as patients. They were similarly barred from a large number of dance halls, skating rinks and restaurants. Even some barbers refused to cut blacks' hair.[78]

Strangely, Alberta's early black residents appear to have been relatively untroubled by the numerous incidents of discrimination they encountered. Newspaper interviews and reminiscences of Amber Valley settlers inevitably mention the harmony which existed between the black and white communities. For example, Thomas Mapp asserted,

> We were always well received by our white neighbors who have been good friends to us throughout these years. It sure was different from Oklahoma because here we felt we were truly free.[79]

In a similar vein, Jeff Edwards remembered,

> At first children in the district stared at me because they had never seen a coloured person before, but they were always kind and polite. It was a pioneer settlement then and people were glad of new neighbors. No one had time for petty bickering. From the beginning, I felt that I belonged.[80]

It may be that these men put a kindly interpretation on past events so as not to stir up long-forgotten antagonisms. But it should be remembered that before coming to Alberta they had lived through the legalized segregation, discrimination and racial violence of the southern United States. In comparison, the Alberta variety of racial discrimination, for the most part localized, sporadic and unorganized, must have seemed relatively benign. And most importantly, it did not receive the sanction of the law. In the eyes of the government and the courts, all Canadians were equal and received fair treatment regardless of their colour. For the black Oklahomans, this factor alone made the decision to come to Canada worthwhile.[81] The enthusiasm of Alberta's blacks for their adopted land is borne out by their eagerness to become Canadian citizens. By 1921, 74% of American-born blacks in Alberta had become naturalized, compared with only 61% of the American immigrant population as a whole.[82]

Nevertheless, the blacks of Amber Valley went to great lengths to avoid provoking racial incidents. As Jeff Edwards once explained, even their child-rearing methods were geared to this end:

> We try to teach our children not to be ashamed of being coloured, but we also teach them that they are a minority and must have the self-discipline and good judgement not to make an issue out of any small incident that might arise.[83]

A conciliatory attitude and avoidance of retaliation was characteristic of the community. And, in keeping with the precepts of Booker T. Washington, after whom Jeff Edwards named one of his sons, they worked very hard and kept to themselves.

It is difficult to assess the success of the Amber

Valley settlement. During the initial homesteading period, the community thrived, reaching a peak population of over 500 during the 1920s.[84] But unfortunately, Amber Valley did not escape the problems which beset all mature farming settlements during the next few decades. The plummeting grain and livestock prices of the depression dealt a devastating blow to farmers. No longer able to make a living from the soil, many blacks left Amber Valley forever. The depopulation continued unabated during the 1940s and 1950s. The soil was too poor and the farms too small in acreage to support all the offspring of the original settlers. Also, since farming was not a valued occupation, many people encouraged their children to acquire an education and leave the farm. Consequently, many moved into Edmonton in search of more lucrative employment and a number of men joined the armed forces during World War II.[85] By 1963, only twenty black families remained in Amber Valley. Now there are fewer than ten.[86]

By conventional economic yardsticks, Amber Valley would not be considered one of Alberta's most successful farming communities. Yet it served its purpose well. Its people accomplished their primary goal of forming a self-sufficient black agricultural settlement, a refuge from both the racism of the American south and the intolerance of white Alberta. Amber Valley helped the black immigrants over the initial period of adjustment to a new country and an unfamiliar environment. And it gave them the opportunity to prove themselves and to refute their critics' claims that blacks were lazy, mentally inferior, criminally inclined, and unsuited to the climate. For these reasons, the black settlement of Amber Valley must be viewed as a success.

Footnotes

[1] Census of Canada, 1911, Vol. 1, p. 163-165.

[2] The change of name from Pine Creek to Amber Valley occurred in 1932 when a post office was established and a contest conducted to choose a new name. The name, Amber Valley, was proposed by one of the community's school teachers and was inspired by the colours of the autumn foliage along Pine Creek. For purposes of convenience and avoiding confusion, the name Amber Valley has been used throughout this thesis.

[3] Kenneth Eric Liddell, Clippings, articles etc. re Athabasca area, 1961, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. (hereafter referred to as Liddell Papers).

[4] David T. Hanbury, Sport and Travel in the Northland of Canada (New York: MacMillan, 1904) p.21, cited by William A. Oppen, "Athabasca Landing" (Honors essay, University of Alberta, 1972), p.56.

[5] William A. Oppen, "Athabasca Landing" (Honors essay, University of Alberta, 1972), p.60.

[6] Donald Norman Stone, "The Process of Rural Settlement in the Athabasca Area, Alberta" (M.A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1970), p. 73.

[7] Ibid., p. 71.

[8] Survey of Athabasca, Industrial Development Branch, Department of Industry and Development, Government of Alberta, 1962, p.15.

[9] Athabasca Northern News, 4 February, 1911.

[10] Stone, "Process of Rural Settlement in the Athabasca Area, Alberta", p. 77.

[11] Oppen, "Athabasca Landing", p.82.

[12] Ibid., p. 76 - 80.

[13] Ibid., p.87.

[14] Stewart Grow, "The Blacks of Amber Valley - Negro Pioneering in Northern Alberta", Canadian Ethnic Studies (1974), p. 27.

[15] Stone, "Process of Rural Settlement in the Athabasca Area, Alberta", p. 115.

[16] Homestead Records, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton. (hereafter referred to as Homestead Records). Most of the citations to the Homestead Records refer to information extracted from ninety-five files pertaining to individual Amber Valley homesteaders. Unfortunately, it is impossible to give a more precise reference because the records are very poorly indexed. The individual file numbers can be obtained only by going through a series of indexes and are therefore of little value in themselves.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Stone, "Process of Rural Settlement in the Athabasca Area, Alberta", p. 141.

[19] Interview with Raymond Tyler, Edmonton, 1 April 1980.

[20] Homestead Records.

[21] Homestead Records; Interview with Alonzo Edwards, Edmonton, 14 April 1980; Interview with Susie Mapp, Edmonton, 28 April 1980; Interview with Raymond Tyler, Edmonton, 1 April 1980.

[22] Homestead Records; Dominion Land Surveyors Field Notes, 1907, Department of Transportation, Edmonton. (hereafter referred to as Dominion Land Surveyors Field Notes); Interview with Alonzo Edwards, Edmonton, 14 April 1980.

[23] Homestead Records; Dominion Land Surveyors Field Notes. It is worth noting that the township most heavily settled by the black Oklahomans (T66 R20 W4) was composed of approximately 28% woodland (covered with trees over three inches in diameter and over ten feet high), 15% scrub, 39% swamp and 18% brulé (recently burned over land).

[24] Interview with Alonzo Edwards, Edmonton, 14 April 1980. Interestingly, the blacks were not the only ethnic settlers who preferred to settle on wooded land in spite of its disadvantages. In 1897, the Commissioner of Immigration complained of the Ukrainians,

> "The Ukrainians are a peculiar people; they will not accept as a gift 160 acres of what we should consider the best land in Manitoba, that is first class wheat growing prairie land; what they particularly want is wood, and they care but little whether the land is heavy soil or light gravel... They do not object to stone...In my opinion it will be many years before they go extensively into grain raising..." in Donald Avery, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the Alien Question 1896-1919: The Anglo-Canadian Perspective" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1973), p.149.

[25] F.F. Parkinson, Biographical Sketches and Articles re Negro Communities in Alberta, 1963, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. (hereafter referred to as Parkinson Papers).

[26] Grow, "Blacks of Amber Valley". p.29.

[27] Edmonton Journal, 6 September 1978.

[28] Parkinson Papers.

[29] Grow, "Blacks of Amber Valley", p.32.

[30] Ibid., p. 32.

[31] Newspaper article, 1969, Edwin Parr Composite High School, Athabasca.

[32] "A Hard Price for Freedom - in the Alberta Wilderness ", Calgary Herald Magazine, 16 August 1974.

[33] Newspaper article, 1969, Edwin Parr Composite High School, Athabasca.

[34] Homestead Records; Stone, "Process of Rural Settlement in the Athabasca Area, Alberta", p. 134.

[35] Homestead Records; Stone, "Process of Rural Settlement in the Athabasca Area, Alberta", p. 110. The contrast revealed by these figures may be exaggerated. Almost all of the Amber Valley settlers filed between 1910 - 1913. To arrive at his 54% figure, Stone included all settlers who had filed before 1915. Although he states that 1911 was the peak year for settlement, he does not list the number of entries per year. It is thus impossible to determine how many settlers filed in 1914 and 1915 and therefore had a later start at fulfilling the homestead regulations than the blacks of Amber Valley.

[36] Homestead Records; Stone, "Process of Rural Settlement in the Athabasca Area, Alberta", p. 146.

[37] Malcolm Mackinnon, "Northward Ho!", Glenbow Archives, Calgary.

[38] Interview with Jessie Rollings, Athabasca, 12 May 1980.

[39] "A Hard Price for Freedom - in the Alberta Wilderness".

[40] Interview with Alonzo Edwards, Edmonton, 14 April 1980; Interview with Katie Milton, Amber Valley, 13 May 1980.

[41] Grow, "Blacks of Amber Valley", p. 30.

[42] Homestead Records.

[43] Robin W. Winks, The Blacks in Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 314.

[44] Edmonton Journal, 7 October 1916.

[45] Homestead Records; Interview with Alonzo Edwards.

[46] Interview with Booker Edwards, Amber Valley, 12 May 1980; newspaper article, 1969, Edwin Parr Composite High School, Athabasca.

[47] John Edwards, "History of the Coloured Colony of Amber Valley" (essay, Edwin Parr Composite High School, Athabasca, 1970).

[48] Interview with Alonzo Edwards.

[49] Parkinson Papers.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Interview with Booker Edwards.

[52] Interview with Alonzo Edwards.

[53] Edmonton Journal, 19 January 1963.

[54] "A Hard Price for Freedom - in the Alberta Wilderness".

[55] Ibid.

[56] Interview with Booker Edwards.

[57] Edwards, "History of the Coloured Colony of Amber Valley".

[58] "A Hard Price for Freedom - in the Alberta Wilderness; Edmonton Journal, 5 December 1979.

[59] Interview with Alonzo Edwards; Interview with Edith Mayes, Edmonton, 15 April 1980.

[60] Interview with Booker Edwards; Interview with Jessie Rollings.

[61] Census of Canada, 1911, Vol. 1, p. 163; Census of Canada, 1921, Vol. 1, p. 537.

[62] Interview with Booker Edwards.

[63] Grow, "Blacks of Amber Valley", p.35.

[64] Edmonton Journal Farm Weekly, 9 April 1924, Immigration Branch Records, R.G. 76, Vol.192, File 72552, pt.6, Public Archives of Canada.

[65] John R. McNichol, *National Liberal - Conservative Convention* (Toronto: Southam Press, 1930), p.97.

[66] *Edmonton Journal*, 6 December 1910.

[67] *Edmonton Capital*, 9 April 1912, cited by Colin A. Thomson, *Blacks in Deep Snow* (Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1979), p. 82.

[68] Thomson, *Blacks in Deep Snow*, p. 82.

[69] *Edmonton Journal*, 31 May 1912.

[70] Ibid., 28 March 1912.

[71] Ibid., 30 July 1912.

[72] Ibid., 17 August 1912.

[73] Ibid., 27 August 1912.

[74] Ibid., 24 August 1912.

[75] Ibid., 5 October 1912.

[76] Alberta Provincial Police Records, File 14, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. It is also interesting to note that in his report to the Superintendent of Immigration on October 26, 1910, C.W. Speers found little evidence of black crime in Edmonton,

> "I inquired through the Chief of Police as to the criminal record of these people and I find on their records of the Police Court, the following charges, preferred against coloured people during the last eight months. Jessie Jones, drunk. Henry Wilson, assault. Ed Brown, creating disturbances. Fred Huston, fighting. Ed Jones, drunk. This completes the record of crime with which black people have been charged in that city." in C.W. Speers to W.D. Scott, 26 October 1910, I.B.R., pt.1.

[77] Interview with Edith Mayes.

[78] Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, pp. 325 & 420.

[79] *Edmonton Journal*, 19 January 1963.

[80] "Kind Hearts and Gentle People", *Family Herald*, 25 June 1959, Liddell Papers.

[81] Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, "Black Settlers in Alberta", *CALUM* (Alumni Association of the University of Calgary, Vol. 12, no.1, September-October 1980), p.9.

[82] Census of Canada, 1921, Vol. 2.

[83] "Kind Hearts and Gentle People".

[84] "A Hard Price for Freedom - in the Alberta Wilderness".

[85] Interview with Booker Edwards.

[86] Edmonton Journal, 19 January 1963. It is significant that while some of the land was bought by white farmers, in many cases the remaining black farmers greatly expanded their holdings. Jeff Edwards for example, acquired an additional ten quarters of land.

Conclusion

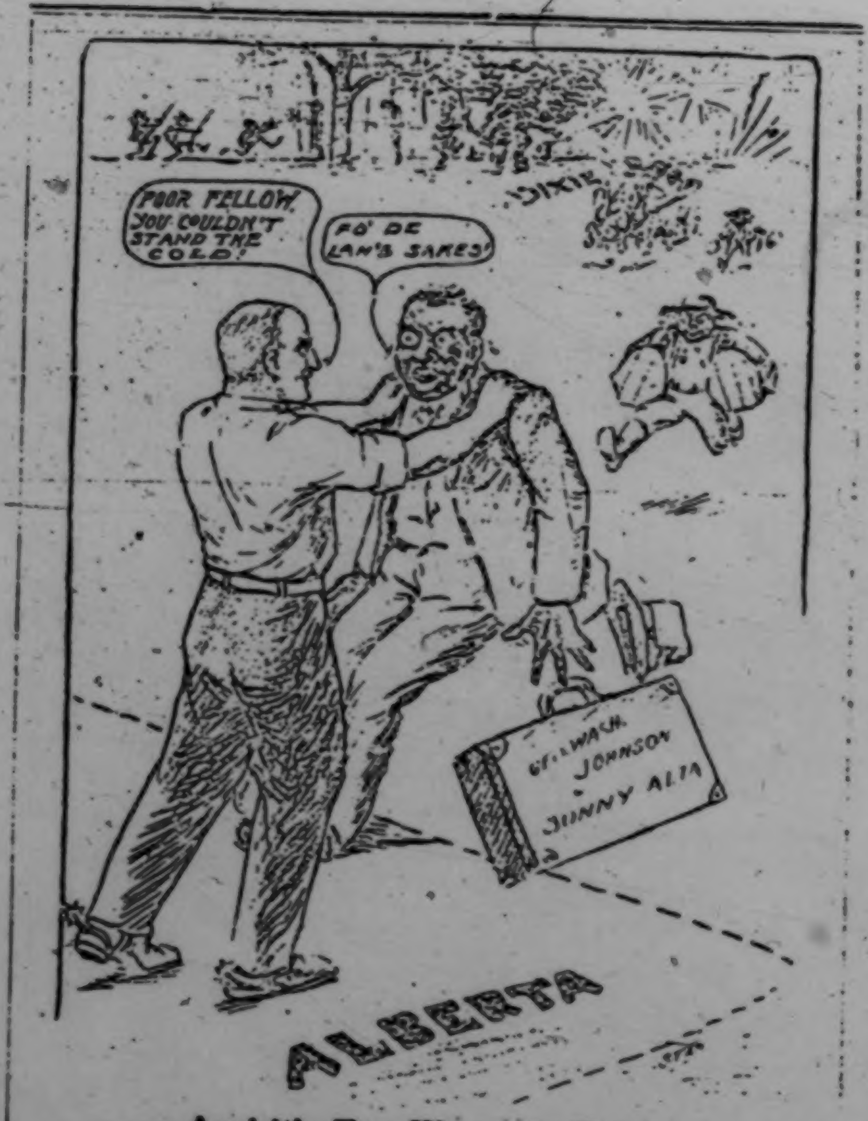
When contrasted with the enormous numbers of Britons, Europeans and Americans who poured into Canada during the years between 1896 and 1914, the immigration of 1300 American blacks pales into insignificance. Yet the black immigration experience was unique and is worthy of notice by historians because of what it reveals about the nature of Alberta society, ethnic settlement and the formulation and implementation of Canadian immigration policy.

The Oklahoma blacks chose perhaps the least propitious time to immigrate to Alberta. Throughout the settlement period, Alberta society was characterized by nativism and ethnocentrism. The British and Americans who formed the dominant element of the population, were unwavering in their belief in the innate superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. Consequently, immigrants were judged by how closely they conformed to the Anglo-Saxon ideal and how easily they would be assimilated. Intolerant and fearful of heterogeneity, Albertans watched with growing resentment as increasing numbers of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants entered the province. But while great concern was expressed over the presence of southern and eastern Europeans, the most intense animosity was reserved for non-white immigrants. During the years immediately preceding the black immigration movement, the influx of a small number of Chinese and Japanese caused a disproportionate uproar.

Considering the prevalence of these ethnocentric attitudes, it was inevitable that the immigration of even a few blacks would be greeted with intense hostility. Of all the diverse groups entering the province, they were the most conspicuously different. Although relatively few Albertans had encountered blacks previously, popular racial stereotypes and widely accepted pseudo-scientific doctrines such as Social Darwinism, provided them with a long list of objections to black immigration. Curiously, the racism of white Albertans was so deeply entrenched that even years of experience with the peaceable, hard-working black settlers did little to dissipate it. During the 1920s and 1930s, discrimination against blacks in Edmonton remained as severe as it had been during the height of the black immigration controversy.

The Laurier government's policy with respect to non-white immigrants was shaped by the interaction of three groups; politicians, civil servants and the public. Even during the years of relatively unrestricted immigration, non-white immigrants were generally viewed with disfavour by the Minister of the Interior and the Immigration Branch. Yet unless faced with a crisis, the government preferred not to take any overt action against them. Without exception, the restrictive measures imposed to limit non-white immigration resulted more from public pressure than the wishes of government. Intense pressure from British Columbia forced the government to introduce restrictive legislation and negotiate an international agreement designed to exclude Asian immigrants. Later, when black immigration became controversial, domestic and international circumstances precluded the open implementation of discriminatory measures. Yet, ways were found of selectively enforcing existing immigration regulations so as to prevent all but a few blacks from entering Canada. Thus, the black immigration experience reveals the infinite flexibility of Canadian immigration legislation and the latitude permitted to the civil servants of the Immigration Branch who interpreted and implemented the government's immigration policy.

The black Oklahomans were undeterred by the hostility of Albertans and the efforts of the government to discourage them. The prospect of cold weather, hard work and prejudice held no terrors for people fleeing the racial violence and legalized segregation and discrimination of the American south. Unlike most immigrants, they did not expect to be fully accepted into Alberta society. Instead they came in large groups, seeking isolation and the opportunity to establish their own self-sufficient communities. In this, they were not unlike other ethnic immigrants to Alberta. However, the black Oklahomans differed from other ethnic settlers because they were not bonded together by a distinctive language, religion or culture. The only characteristic they shared was their colour. Yet for the sake of self-preservation they strove to establish a common cultural meeting ground, organizing clubs and associations modelled on those characteristic of black communities in the United States and calling forth a spirit of black nationalism. Socially, they reached outwards to the other tiny black settlements sprawled across the prairie rather than to their white neighbors. However, these clannish, inward-looking attitudes were not of their own choosing. Rather, they were imposed upon them both by their experiences of harsh repression in the United States and by the prejudice of white Albertans. In this respect, the black immigration experience may have interesting implications with respect to the nature of ethnic settlement in Alberta.


POOR FELLOW, YOU COULDN'T STAND THE COLD!
FO' DE LAN'S SAKES!
DIXIE
GE. WASH. JOHNSON
SUNNY ALTA
ALBERTA

And it's Too Warm in Dixie

I. · Editorial Cartoon, Edmonton Journal, 5 May 1911.

II. Black Population of Canadian Provinces with Percentage of Total Population in Brackets.

Province	1901	1911	1921
British Columbia	532 (.29)	473 (.12)	676 (.12)
Alberta	31 (.04)	979 (.26)	1048 (.17)
Saskatchewan	6 (.006)	336 (.06)	396 (.05)
Manitoba	61 (.02)	209 (.04)	491 (.08)
Ontario	8,935 (.4)	6,747 (.26)	7,220 (.24)
Quebec	280 (.01)	401 (.01)	1,046 (.04)
Nova Scotia	5,984 (1.3)	6,541 (1.32)	6,174 (1.17)
New Brunswick	1,368 (.4)	1,079 (.3)	1,190 (.3)
Prince Edward Island	141 (.13)	81 (.08)	43 (.04)

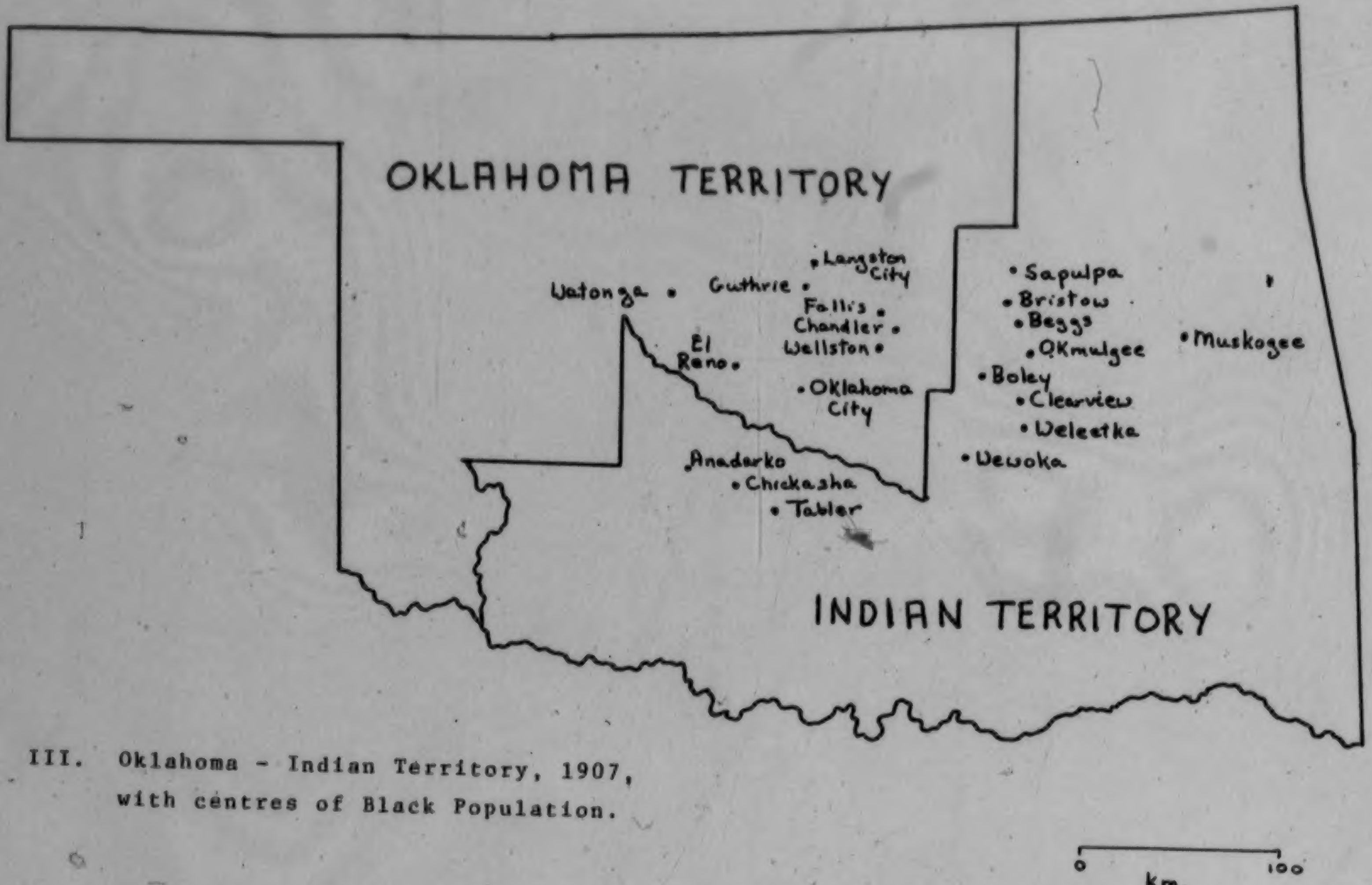
Total black population of Canada with percentage of total population in brackets:

1901 - 17,437 (.32)

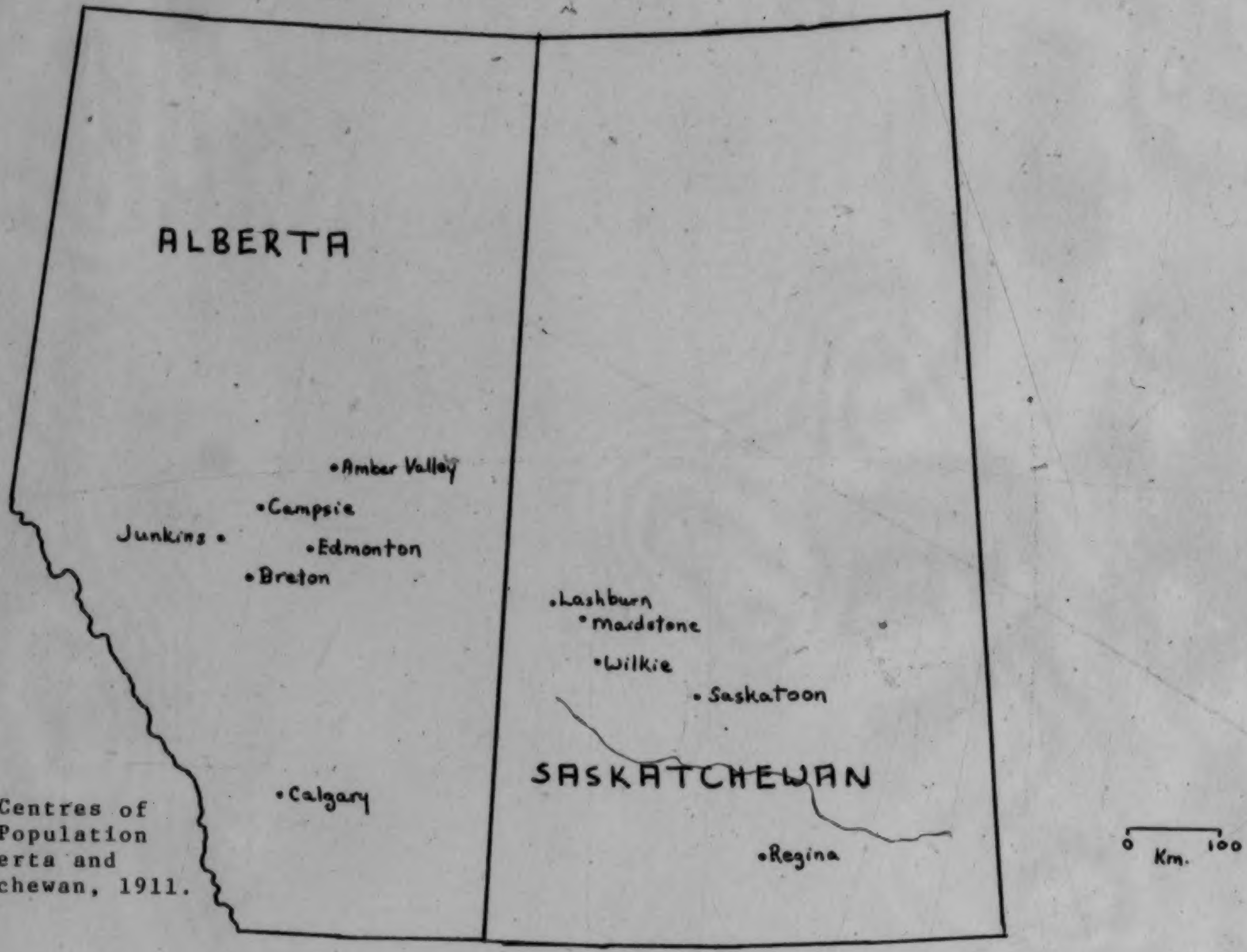
1911 - 16,877 (.23)

1921 - 18,291 (.21)

Source: Census of Canada, 1921, Vol. 1, pp. 353 -355.


OKLAHOMA TERRITORY
INDIAN TERRITORY
Langston City
Watonga
Guthrie
Fallis
Chandler
Wellston
El Reno
Oklahoma City
Anadarko
Chickasha
Tabler
Sapulpa
Bristow
Beggs
Okmulgee
Muskogee
Boley
Clearview
Weleetka
Wewoka
0
100
Km.

III. Oklahoma - Indian Territory, 1907, with centres of Black Population.


ALBERTA
SASKATCHEWAN
Amber Valley
Campsie
Junkins
Edmonton
Breton
Calgary
Lashburn
Maidstone
Wilkie
Saskatoon
Regina
0 Km. 100

IV. Rural Centres of Black Population in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1911.

Appendix - An Explanation of Terminology and Research Methods

Throughout this thesis, the Oklahoma immigrants have been referred to as "blacks". Earlier in this century, "Negro" was the most commonly accepted term. Indeed, it is still used today for the purposes of statistical classification. Nevertheless, in the minds of many, "Negro" has acquired pejorative connotations, and since the term "black" has passed into common usage, it has been used in preference.

The Homestead Records of the Department of the Interior, available on microfilm at the Provincial Archives of Alberta, were a most valuable source of information for this thesis. When I began examining the records to locate the files of as many Amber Valley settlers as possible, I had little information with which to narrow down the search. I knew only where the settlers came from, the approximate years of their immigration, the general location in which they settled and a few family names. The first step was to examine the homestead registers of ten townships in the Athabasca area, centred on Amber Valley. The registers list only the names of the settlers who filed on each quarter section. The names and file numbers of all homesteaders who filed between 1909 and 1914 were noted, with the exception of those whose names obviously indicated their European origins.

Next, the files of the selected settlers were examined, to determine which ones were black. This proved easier than expected. The vast majority of the non-black homesteaders were readily eliminated because of their birthplace or previous place of residence. And fortuitously, an official in the Dominion Lands Office had scrawled the words "Negro" or "Coloured" on the front of a large proportion of the files. At least 70% of the black homesteaders were located in this manner. Others were added because they had the same surname as a settler who had been noted as black. A few more were presumed black because they had been born in the south, resided in Oklahoma and had settled in the midst of other black settlers.

As a result of this examination of the Homestead Records, a total of ninety-five individual Amber Valley homesteaders were located. Although all possible care was taken, it cannot be claimed that all the black settlers were included. In the interests of accuracy, if there was any reasonable doubt concerning a homesteader's race, he was eliminated for the purposes of this study. Undoubtedly, a few blacks were thus excluded. As well, at least 10% of the individual homesteader's files are missing from the Homestead Records. Likely, some of these missing records were those of black homesteaders. For these reasons, it is difficult to estimate exactly how many black homesteaders and their families settled in the Amber Valley area.

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